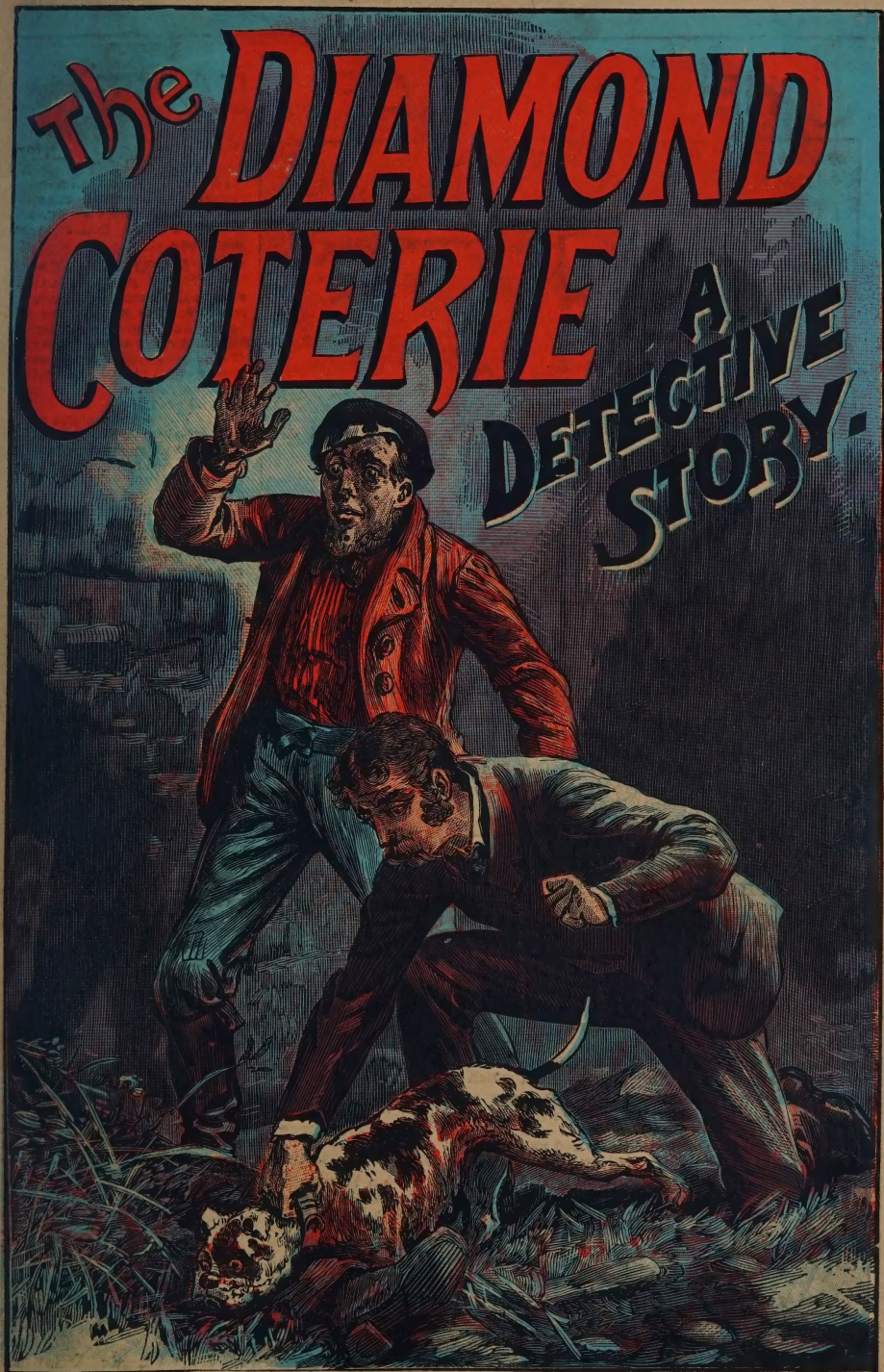
PRICE SIXPENCE

The DIAMOND COTERIE

A DETECTIVE STORY.



BY LAWRENCE L. LYNCH

THE SPRING OF HEALTH.

SUNNY MOMENTS.

"A kiss when my bath is over
A kiss when my bath begins;
My mother is full of kisses,
As nurse is full of pins."—WAUGH.

THE BEST ANTIDOTE FOR EXCITEMENT.—Half a dozen Native Oysters (well chewed) two or three times a day, and ENO'S FRUIT SALT every few hours.

TO PARENTS.—ENO'S FRUIT SALT is invaluable in the Nursery as a gentle laxative; it is pleasant to the taste, and much superior to senna or other nauseous drugs. It corrects the ill effects of overeating or exhaustion, and is extremely beneficial in any feverishness or heat of the skin. The bowels ought to be kept free by the FRUIT SALT for a month or six weeks after eruptive diseases, as Measles, Scarlet Fever, Chicken-pox, Small-pox, and all Fevers or Infectious Diseases, &c.; for its use frees the system of the "dregs." Many disastrous results would be avoided by attending to this. In the nursery it is beyond praise.

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From the Rev. Dr. HURST, Vicar of Collerley:—"I have used your FRUIT SALT for many years, and have verified your statements. The thanks of the public are due to you for your unceasing efforts to relieve suffering humanity. Long may you live to be a blessing to the world!"

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ENO'S FRUIT SALT *VERSUS* BRANDY.—"There were a few attacks of mild dysentery, brought mainly on by ill-considered devotion to brandy, or biliousness produced by the same cause. For the latter we used to swear by ENO'S FRUIT SALT, which is simply invaluable."—*See* "Coral Lands," Vol. I.

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THE

DIAMOND COTERIE

A DETECTIVE STORY

BY

LAWRENCE L. LYNCH

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWED BY THREE"

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

GLASGOW AND NEW YORK

1887

A Wonderful Medicine.

For Biliousness, Nervousness, Loss of Appetite, Sick Headache, Giddiness, Fulness, Dizziness and Depression, Cold Chills, Shortness of Breath, Costiveness, Scurvy, Blotches on the Skin, Disturbed Sleep, and Trembling Sensations, they are universally admitted to be

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THE DIAMOND COTERIE.

CHAPTER I.

TWO SHOCKS FOR W——.

On a certain Saturday in June, year of our Lord 1880, between the hours of sunrise and sunset, the town of W——, in a State which shall be nameless, received two shocks.

Small affairs, concerning small people, could never have thrown W—— into such a state of excitement, for she was a large and wealthy town, and understood what was due to herself.

She possessed many factories, and sometimes a man came to his death among the ponderous machinery. Not long since, one "hand" had stabbed another, fatally; and, still later, a factory girl had committed suicide.

These things created a ripple, nothing more. It would ill become a town, boasting its aristocracy and "style," to grow frenzied over the woes of such common people. But W—— possessed a goodly number of wealthy families, and some blue blood. These were worthy of consideration, and upon these calamity had fallen. Let us read an extract or two from the W—— *Argus*, a newspaper of much enterprise and exceeding veracity:

MONSTROUS DIAMOND ROBBERY—BOLD BURGLARY.

This day we are startled by the news of a robbery in our midst, the like of which it has never been our fate to chronicle.

When the servants at Wardour Place arose this morning, they found confusion reigning in the library, desks forced open, papers strewn about, and furniture disarranged. One of the long windows had been opened by forcing the shutters, and then cutting out a pane of glass, after which the bolts were easily drawn.

Miss Wardour was at once aroused, and further examination disclosed the fact that her dressing-room had been invaded, and every box, trunk, and drawer searched. The beautiful little affair, which has the appearance of a miniature combined desk and bookcase, but which contains a small safe, that Miss Wardour believed burglar-proof, had been forced, and the jewels so widely known as the "Wardour diamonds," stolen. Quite a large sum of money, and some papers of value, were also taken.

Most of our readers are familiar with the history of the Wardour diamonds, and know that they represented a fortune.

The burglary was effected without noise, not a sound disturbing Miss Wardour, or any of her servants, some of whom are light sleepers, and they have not a single clue by which to trace the robbers.

Miss Wardour bears the loss with great calmness. Of course every effort will be made to recover the jewels, and capture the thieves. It is rumoured that Mr. Jasper Lamotte, in behalf of Miss Wardour, will visit the city at once and set the detectives at work.

This was shock number one for the public of W——.

Miss Constance Wardour, of Wardour Place, was a lady of distinction. She possessed the oldest name, the bluest blood, the fairest face, and the longest purse, to be found in W——; and, the *Argus* had said truly, the Wardour diamonds represented a fortune, and not a small one.

Emmeline Wardour, the great grandmother of Miss Constance, was a belle and heiress. Her fondness for rare jewels amounted to a mania, and she spent enormous sums in collecting rare gems. At her death she bequeathed to her daughter a collection such as is owned by few ladies in private life. She also bequeathed to her daughter her mania. This daughter, after whom Constance was named, added to her mother's store of precious stones, from time to time, and when, one fine day, a bank, in which she had deposited some thousands of her dollars, failed, and she found herself a loser, she brought her craze to a climax, by converting all her money into diamonds, set and unset.

At her death, her granddaughter, Constance, inherited these treasures, in addition to a handsome fortune from her mother; and, although the original collection made by Emmeline Wardour contained a variety of rare stones, opals, amethysts, pearls, cameos,

&c., besides the many fine diamonds, they all came to be classed under the head of the "Wardour diamonds."

It is small wonder that W—— stood aghast at the thought of such a robbery, and it is impossible to say when the talk, the wonderment, the conjectures, suggestions, theories, and general indignation would have ended, had not the second shock overborne the first. Once more let the *Argus* speak:

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Yesterday afternoon, while the town was filled with the excitement caused by the Wardour robbery, Miss Sybil Lamotte, the beautiful daughter of our wealthy and highly-respected citizen, Jasper Lamotte, Esq., eloped with John Burrill, who was, for a time, foreman in one of her father's mills. Burrill is known to be a divorced man, having a former wife and a child living in W——; and his elopement with one of the aristocracy has filled the town with consternation.

Mr. Lamotte, the father of the young lady, had not been from home two hours, in company with his wife, when his daughter fled. He was *en route* for the city, to procure the services of detectives, in the hope of recovering the Wardour diamonds; both his sons were absent from home as well. Mr. Lamotte has not yet returned, and is still ignorant of his daughter's flight.

Thus abruptly and reluctantly ends the second *Argus* bombshell, and this same last bombshell had been a very different thing to handle. It might have been made more sensational, and the editor had sighed as he penned the cautiously worded lines: "It was a monstrous *mesalliance*, and a great deal could be said in disparagement of Mr. John Burrill;" but Mr. Lamotte was absent; the brothers Lamotte were absent; and until he was certain what steps they would take in this matter, it were wise to err on the safe side. Sybil was an only daughter. Parents are sometimes prone to forgive much; it might be best to "let Mr. Burrill off easy."

Thus to himself reasoned the editor, and, having bridled his pen, much against his will, he set free his tongue, and in the bosom of his family discoursed very freely of Mr. John Burrill.

"My dear, it's unendurable," he announced to the little woman opposite, with the nod of a Solomon. "It's perfectly *incomprehensible*, how such a girl could do it. Why, he's a braggart and a bully. He drinks in our public saloons, and handles a woman's name as he does his beer-glass. The factory men say that he has boasted openly that he meant to marry Miss Lamotte, *or* Miss Wardour, he couldn't decide which. By the by, it's rather odd that those two young ladies should meet with such dissimilar misfortunes on the same day."

Mrs. Editor, a small woman, who, from constantly hearing, and absorbing into the vacuum of her own mind, the words of wisdom falling from the mouth of her husband, had acquired an expression of being always ready and willing to be convinced, looked up from her teapot and propounded the following:

"W-what do you s'pose she eloped with him for?"

"Maria, I believe I have told you frequently that there is no such word as 's'pose.' I don't *suppose* anything about it. It's enough to make one believe in witchcraft. Miss Sybil Lamotte held her head above *us;* above plenty more, who were the peers of Mr. John Burrill. Last year, as everybody knows, she refused Robert Crofton, who is handsome, rich, and upright in character. This spring, they say, she jilted Raymond Vandyck, and people who ought to know, say that they were engaged. Why, Ray Vandyck comes of the best old Dutch stock, and his fortune is something worth while. I wonder what young Vandyck will say to this, and how that high-stepping old lady, his mother, will fancy having her son thrown over for John Burrill. I wish I knew how Jasper Lamotte would take it."

So, in many a household, tongues wagged fast and furious; misfortune had smitten the mighty ones of W——, and brought them within range of the gossiping tongues of their social inferiors; and, while the village oracles improve their opportunities, and old women hatch theories, the like of which were never heard on earth, let us make the acquaintance of some of the "mighty ones."

CHAPTER II.

W—— INVESTIGATES.

WARDOUR Place, the home of Miss Constance Wardour, and the scene of the "*great* Diamond Robbery," lies a little east from the town, away from the clamour of its mills, and the contamination of its *canaille*.

It is a beautiful old place, built upon a

slight elevation, surrounded by stately old trees, with a wide sweep of well-kept lawn bordered with rose thickets, and dotted here and there with great clumps of tall syringas, white lilacs, acacias, and a variety of ornamental trees and flowering shrubs.

The mansion stands some distance from the road, and is reached by a broad, sweeping drive and two footpaths that approach from opposite directions.

In the rear are orchard and gardens, and beyond these a grassy slope that curves down to meet the river, that is ever hurrying townward to seize the great mill-wheels and set them sweeping round and round.

The mansion itself is a large, roomy edifice, built by a master architect. It at once impresses one with a sense of its true purpose: a home, stately but not stiff, abounding in comfort and aristocratic ease; a place of serene repose and inborn refinement. Such, Wardour Place was intended to be; such, it has been and is.

Miss Constance Wardour, mistress of the domain and last of the race, is alone in her own favourite morning-room. It is two hours since the discovery of the robbery, and during those two hours confusion has reigned supreme. Everybody, except Miss Wardour, has seemingly run wild. But Miss Wardour has kept her head, and has prevented the servants from giving the alarm upon the highway, and thus filling her house with a promiscuous mob. She has compelled them to comport themselves like rational beings; has ordered the library and dressing-room to be closed, and left untouched until the proper officer shall have made proper investigations; and then she has ordered her maid to serve her with a cup of strong coffee in the morning room; and, considering the glittering wealth she has just been bereaved of, Miss Wardour looks very calm and unruffled, and sips her coffee with a relish.

Presently the door opens and a lady enters: a very fat lady, with florid complexion, restless, inquisitive, but good-humoured gray eyes, and plenty of dark crinkly hair, combed low about her ears.

This is Mrs. Honor Aliston, a distant relative of Miss Wardour's, who has found a most delightful home with that young lady, ever since the death of Grandmamma Wardour, for Constance Wardour has been an orphan since her childhood.

Mrs. Aliston comes forward, rather rolls forward, and sinking, with a grunt of satisfaction, into the largest chair at hand, fixes two gray eyes upon the heiress, which that young lady, perceiving, says, "Well?"

"Don't say 'well' to me. I've just come down from the mansard," gasped the widow Aliston.

"From the *mansard?*"

"Yes," fanning herself briskly with the pages of an uncut magazine.

Constance laughs musically. "Why, Aunt Honor, you didn't expect to see the robbers running across the country, did you?"

"Not I," disdainfully. "I wanted to see how long it took the news to get to—Mapleton."

"Oh!" indifferently.

"And—they're coming."

"So soon!"

"So soon! and the sheriff, or constable, or coroner,—*who* is it that make these investigations? He's coming, at any rate, whoever he is, with a mob at his heels. Who did you send for, Con?"

"For Mr. O'Meara, of course, and—I would like to see Ray Vandyck."

"What for?"

Constance laughed. "Oh, I am fond of Ray, you know, and I think he would offer some unique suggestions; besides—dear me, auntie!" breaking off suddenly, "I wish this farce was at an end."

Mrs. Aliston's gray eyes twinkled. "Why, child, you may be thankful it's no worse. Suppose—"

"Hush, Aunt Honor. 'Walls have ears,' you know. I have half a mind to take Mr. Lamotte into my—"

"Constance Wardour, *what* are you thinking about? 'Take Mr. Lamotte!' that means Frank Lamotte and Madame Lamotte, and *that* means all the rest."

"I said '*half* a mind,' auntie. I don't think the notion will ever get its growth. I think we will see the end of this affair through our own spectacles; but—hear that noise! Are they bringing a legion of people? Auntie, I don't believe you have had a cup of coffee yet."

"Don't you? Well, I *have*, my child. Let's go out and meet those people. They will bring all the dirt that lay loose on the highway on the soles of their boots. Con," turning suddenly, "you don't look solemn enough."

Without heeding this last remark, Constance

Wardour throws open the door, and passes out and down the hall to meet the party just entering.

There is Mr. Soames, the Mayor of W——, very bustling and important; Corliss, the constable, exceedingly shrewd in his own opinion, and looking on this occasion as wise as an owl; Thomas Craig, Esq., sub-editor of the *Argus;* and some lesser lights, who on one pretext and another, hope to gain admittance and sate their curiosity.

"Really, Miss Wardour," begins the bustling Mayor, "really, this is a sad affair! miserable affair! Must have given you a terrible fright, and then the loss!—but we will find them. Of course your jewels, such valuables, can't be kept hid from sharp detectives—a—Corliss, what had we better do first?" for Mayor Soames, like many another mayor, is about as capable of fulfilling his duties as an average ten-year-old.

Corliss, however, comes gallantly to the rescue. He is equal to any emergency; there is nothing, if you take his word as proof, that Corliss is *not* equal to.

"First," says Corliss, "I think we had better—ahem—investigate."

"To be sure—investigate, of course—Miss Wardour, you have—"

"Closed up the disturbed rooms," interrupts Constance, promptly. "Yes, sir; I fear you will find little there to assist you. Nelly, throw open the library."

The servant, thus commanded, took from her mistress's hand a key, unlocked the library door and threw it open; and then the farce began.

If there is anything in all our dispensations of law and order that is calculated to strike astonishment to the heart and mind of a foreigner, it is our off-hand way of conducting a police investigation. In other countries, to be a magistrate, a notary, means to be in some degree qualified for the position; to be a constable, means to possess a moderate allowance of mother wit, and a small measure of "muscular Christianity;" and to discover a crime, means to follow it up with a thorough and systematic investigation. Such is not our mode. With us, to hold office, means to get a salary; and to conduct an investigation, means to maunder through some sort of farce, which gives the criminal time to make good his escape, and to permit the newspapers to seize upon and publish every item, to detail every clue, as fast as discovered; all this being in favour of the law-breakers, and detrimental to the conscientious officers of justice.

In France, they complain of too much red tape in the police department. Let them supply us out of their superabundance; we have too little.

While Corliss "investigates," the mayor delivers an impromptu oration; and Mr. Craig, of the *Argus*, takes notes, according to his own light.

Out of his inner consciousness, the *Argus* man evokes an idea, which Corliss is not slow to adopt and use as his own.

"I suppose they will have a detective down as soon as possible," says Mr. Craig, as Corliss lays one ruthless hand on an overturned chair. "If I were you, Corliss, I would leave everything exactly as I find it, for the benefit of whoever works up the case."

Corliss slowly lowers the chair to its former position, and turns upon Craig a look of offended dignity.

"Why, what did you suppose I intended to do?"

"Umph!" retorted Craig, with a disrespectful sniff, "I rather thought you intended to sit down in that chair."

Turning his back upon the flippant young man, so sadly lacking in respect for the "powers that be," Corliss pursues his investigations. He has read, in many novels and sensational newspapers, vivid descriptions of similar examinations, and he goes to work after the most approved fashion. He scrutinizes the window, the open blind, the cut pane, the hangings within and the down-trodden shrubbery without; he darts out, and dives in; he peers under everything, over everything, into everything; he inspects, over and again, the mutilated writing case, or safe, from which the treasure was actually taken; and raps and sounds it as if in search of some private receptacle that the thieves had overlooked, or Miss Wardour never found out. He goes down flat upon his stomach, and scrutinizes Miss Wardour's scrupulously swept carpets, in search of a footprint in the dust that is not there.

While he performs these feats, the mayor follows him about solemnly, and full of wondering admiration; and the man of the *Argus* scribbles, and chuckles and grins maliciously.

Meantime, there have been other arrivals at Wardour Place; and Constance, leaving the inspectors to their own devices, is standing in her drawing-room, talking earnestly with a

broad-shouldered, handsome man, who looks much surprised at the tale she is telling.

"How unfortunate, and how fortunate," he says, depositing his hat upon the table beside him. "I came here to speak of our river excursion, and lo, I am in the midst of a sensation."

Constance laughed.

"And surrounded by forlorn females," she supplemented. "Aunt Honor won't recover from the fright in a week, although she looks so fierce at present."

Mrs. Aliston, who is seated at the farthest window, half buried by the lace draperies, and looking steadfastly down the road, pops out her head to retort:

"It's time to look fierce; don't I know that those Vandals in the next room will make as big a muddle as if they were in sympathy with the burglars?"

Constance laughed easily.

"They can't do much harm, auntie; the burglars did not leave a trace; I am positive of that." Then turning to the new comer, "I am very glad you came just now, Doctor Heath; you may help me with your advice. I have sent for my lawyer, Mr. O'Meara; but, for some reason he does not come."

"Mr. O'Meara left for the city last night."

"Oh! I am sorry for that; he would be sure to know how to proceed, and who to employ. Doctor Heath, you are of course acquainted in the city; tell me of a good man, a *really* good one. I intend to spare no expense in hunting these robbers."

"And these diamonds," from behind the curtain.

"Aunt Honor, you are like the ghost in the pantomime; come out and be one of us."

"I won't."

"Very well, then; but seriously, Doctor Heath, if I can't secure but the one, let it be the robbers. Do you know I have a fancy that if we caught them or him, it would put an end to some of our mysteries. You have not been among us very long; but, don't you think we have more than our average of crime?"

"I had not observed, Miss Wardour,"

"Less than a year ago, Brant, the jeweller, was a heavy loser. Within the year, three banks in this vicinity have been robbed. Last summer, Mark Olson, a farmer, drew from the bank several thousand dollars, intending to purchase land. Half way between W—— and his home he was waylaid, knocked from his horse, robbed, and left in the road senseless. I could name to you no less than seven private residences that have been burglarized within the past ten months, and if I related to you the circumstances attending each robbery, you would be satisfied, as I am, that, *in every case*, the robbers knew their ground, and did not work at random."

"And you have noted each of these events so accurately, Miss Wardour, and yet, were not—warned."

"I have noted all these events, Doctor Heath, and yet—have been robbed."

Doctor Heath bends his eyes upon the floor, and remains silent; there is no possibility of reading his thoughts in his face. It is a fine face, however, and Miss Wardour must be pardoned if she takes advantage of this temporary abstraction, to gaze full at him for one moment. The close-cropped thick brown hair displays a well shaped head, the forehead is broad and full, the eyes large, dark gray, and capable of almost any expression; usually they look out from his handsome face with a half contemptuous indifference to all things, that leads one to fancy those eyes may have a history; this may or may not be the case. Doctor Heath came to W—— less than a year ago, armed with a personal certificate of merit from the first of the great New York physicians, bought out the practice of a broken-down old resident doctor, fitted up a handsome office, and settled down to his business. He hired a small cottage as a place of residence, installed a deaf old woman as housekeeper and maid of all work, and lived a quiet bachelor life, riding a good horse, smoking a good cigar, and growing in favour with polite W—— society.

And this is absolutely all that W—— can tell concerning Dr. Clifford Heath. What was his past, whence he came, what the length of his purse or pedigree, no one knows. People have tried to find out something, of course; but Doctor Heath has a wonderful way of setting aside the hints of the curious, and he ignores the right of W—— to know his private history with a cool impertinence that is as exasperating as it is effectual.

As he thinks, Miss Wardour watches; but no change comes over the calm, smooth-shaven face; every feature expresses firmness and strength, and nothing more.

"And so you want an able officer to take this business in hand, Miss Wardour," says Clifford Heath, at length. "If it is as you

suspect, it will need a shrewd man, and you have no clue, save those that are now being inspected," with a light laugh, "by our worthy constable and his supporters."

Constance Wardour arose and came close to the table, speaking in a low voice.

"Yes, Doctor Heath, I will trust *you*, although I intended saying nothing of this until an officer arrived. I have a clue, slight although it may be, it is—"

She drew from her pocket a small white roll, and unfolding it, held up for his inspection *half* of a fine cambric handkerchief, and a tiny stoppered vial of finest cut glass.

Doctor Heath glanced at the vial and uttered one word.

"Chloroform."

"Chloroform," repeated Miss Wardour, "when I was awakened by the knocking at my door, I found this," shaking the fragment of cambric, "lying lightly across my face, and the vial on the little night-stand beside my bed. Aunt Honor was rapping for admittance, and when she had made me comprehend the situation, we decided that it was best to say nothing of this. What seems most strange is, that it was administered with so much care. I am affected by the smallest quantity of the drug, and an ordinary dose would have put me under medical treatment. I could not have left my bed for a week, had they given me as much as would serve only to stupefy Aunt Honor there."

"No," interrupted Mrs. Aliston, once more half emerging from her window. "It would have been worse than that; I think an overdose of chloroform would kill Constance. It seems as if they knew just how much to give."

Was it fancy, or did a troubled look rest for a moment in the eyes of Doctor Heath, and on his countenance a shade of pallor?

"This is, to my mind, the most serious aspect of the affair," he said, gravely. "Mrs. Aliston is right; an overdose of that drug would be fatal to you. Your life has been jeopardized. I agree with Mrs. Aliston; your investigation *is* in the hands of bunglers; let us hunt these fellows down."

"I will see that an officer is telegraphed for at once; but—shall I send to the regular bureau, or—how?"

"There is one man in the city, if he *is* in the city now, who is qualified for the position he holds. He has withdrawn himself from the regular force, and acts solely on his own responsibility. He is much sought after, and possesses wonderful abilities: some of his exploits have been truly astounding."

"And this man is—"

"Mr. Lamotte; Mr. Francis Lamotte," announced a servant.

"Show them in," said Constance, at the same time gathering up the piece of cambric and the little vial and putting them in her pocket.

Doctor Heath arose, and taking up his hat, murmured an apology.

"I have a patient at this hour, Miss Wardour, and will call again during the day. You will not stand in need of my counsel now," smilingly; "Mr. Lamotte can give you all needful advice, and he is sure to be right," and Doctor Heath bowed himself out.

"The Wardour diamonds," he muttered, as he mounted his horse. "And to think that they almost cost her her life; a skilled hand, was it? Well, when the detective comes, I, too, may have a clue for him."

CHAPTER III.

A SAMPLE OF THE LAMOTTE BLOOD.

MR. JASPER LAMOTTE is a tall man, a dark man, and a stately man. He is grave of speech, yet very suave and pleasing. He is open-handed and charitable, and a very popular man among the people of W——. He will rein in his blooded horses to ask after the health of his factory hands, and doff his hat to the wife of his humblest tenant. He has been for many years a resident of W——. Years ago he was a great traveller, coming and going almost incessantly, but, after a time, he built the largest and newest of the W—— mills, and settled himself down to rear his family, and attend in person to his "bales and shekels."

Francis Lamotte is, what his father has been, a tall, dark eyed, sallow skinned young man, with a Greek profile, a profusion of curling dusky hair, a soft, slow voice, a sweet and most pleasing smile; aristocratic hands and feet, a most affable manner—a very agreeable companion, and a dutiful son and brother. So saith W——. Such is Francis Lamotte, and being such, he is voted, with one consent, the handsomest young man in W——. Francis Lamotte, too, is popular with the people of W——; handsome and fascinating, the son of a father whose fortune is said to be enormous, he is welcomed in every household circle, and

he brings pleasure and courtesy wherever he enters.

"Constance, my child, what is this that I hear?" exclaims Jasper Lamotte, taking the hand of Miss Wardour as she advances to meet him. "Have they not exaggerated the truth? The village is full of rumours."

"Constance, good morning," breaks in Francis Lamotte. "Father's head is a little turned by all this. *Have* you had a burglar? *Have* they stolen the Wardour diamonds? And *are* you frightened to death? And," with a malicious glance toward Mrs. Aliston, who had forsaken her window and was rolling slowly towards them, serene and dignified, "did they bind and gag dear Mrs. A—?"

"Yes, yes! and no, no!" says Constance, cutting off the retort that was rising to the lips of her aunt. "Be seated, Mr. Lamotte; sit down, Frank. I have 'had a burglar,' they did steal my diamonds. But—well, they did not frighten me, for I was not aware of their presence, and they did not bind Aunt Honor, for they—"

"Hadn't rope enough," interrupts that lady, at which they all laugh.

"But seriously, Constance," resumes Lamotte *père*, this is a bad business; a *very* bad business. Good gracious! are we all to be robbed at the pleasure of these rascals? plundered whenever their pockets run dry? It's abominable! What has been done? There should be an officer on the spot now."

"So there is," breaks in Aunt Honor, with suspicious sweetness. "Constable Corliss and Mayor Soames are examining the library and dressing-room."

Mr. Lamotte retains his gravity, but after exchanging demure glances, and in spite of themselves, Constance and Francis Lamotte laugh outright.

"Then, my friends, let us await a revelation," Francis drawls in the most approved "camp-meeting" fashion.

"Poor Corliss!" Mr. Lamotte smiles slightly. "At any rate he will try to do his duty. But, Constance, you should have an officer here as soon as possible; I should not come here venturing my suggestions but I learned, accidentally, that your lawyer, O'Meara, is absent; that is another misfortune. O'Meara has a long, clear head; would not make a bad detective himself. As he *is* away, and you need some one to act for you, why, I place myself at your disposal; if you have not already appointed an agent," with another smile.

"I have made no move in the matter, Mr. Lamotte; indeed I have hardly had time to think, as yet. I suppose, too, that we have lost valuable time, and yet we can't get a detective down here in a moment. Pray take what measures you deem best, and let us have the *best* officer that we can get. I am especially anxious to capture the thieves if possible—and the diamonds—of course."

"'England expects every man to do his duty,'" quoted Francis. "Constance, give me an appointment, too."

"So I will," retorted Constance, wickedly. "I think you are eminently fitted to assist—Mr. Corliss."

"Frank, be serious" says Mr. Lamotte, with a touch of severity. "Now Constance, let us do what we can to make up for this unavoidable loss of time; first tell me, as minutely as you can, just how this robbery was discovered."

"It's a very brief story," says Constance, smiling slightly, and then she narrates, in a somewhat hurried manner, as if she were weary of the subject, and wanted to have done with it, the events of the morning, omitting, however, to mention the finding of the chloroform vial, and the half square of cambric.

"Mr. Soames and the constable—and several more, were on the spot with great promptness," finished she, with a comical glance towards Mrs. Ailston.

"We overlooked their proceedings until we discovered that they would do no actual damage, but would leave everything exactly as they found it, and then—"

"Yes," interrupted Francis, with a queer smile upon his lips, "and then you found a more agreeable occupation."

"And then," continued Constance, as if she had not heard him, but returning his half-malicious look with interest, "Dr. Heath called, and I told him all about it. He is very clear-headed and sensible, and I was sorry his time was so limited; he might have been of some assistance, and—"

"Too bad," again broke in young Lamotte, with something very like a sneer upon his handsome face. "Let me repair the damage. I'll tell him to call—"

"Oh, not at all, Frank; pardon my interruption," said the girl, turning her eyes full upon him with artful artlessness. "You are very good, but it's quite unnecessary. Dr. Heath promised to call again during the day or evening."

Frank Lamotte bit his lip, but kept silent; and the elder man came to the rescue. He had been thinking, and without seeming to have noticed the little passage at arms, he arose and said: "Well, Constance, I don't see that talking will do much good just now; what the occasion demands is action. My first impulse was to telegraph at once for an officer from the city force, but, on reflection, I think it better not to use the telegraph. Our every movement may be closely noted, and to send a message would be to set some one watching for the arrival of a detective, and once his identity becomes known, farewell to his prospects of success. It will take a few hours longer to get him here, but I think I had better visit the city in person, lay the case before our man, and so enable him to enter the town prepared for his work, and able to maintain his incognito. I have business of my own in the city, and Mrs. Lamotte is anxious to do some shopping. Women are always anxious to shop, I believe. I will return home at once, and give her warning; it will look less like a business trip if she accompanies me. How does this plan suit you?"

"Any plan that brings us a competent officer as early as possible, will suit me," replied Constance. "It's *very* good of you to take all this trouble, Mr. Lamotte."

"Nothing of the sort," expostulated Mr. Lamotte, heartily. "I am always at the service of my daughter's dearest friend. By the by, Sybil is not yet aware of your loss. I did not enlighten her, for I knew she would insist upon coming with me, and that," smiling a little, "would have necessitated waiting for toilette."

"And apropos of toilettes," cried his son, springing up. "There is *Mere*, she will want due warning, for nothing short of a full hour will she take. So, sir, let's take a look at Soames and Corliss, and hasten our departure."

"Right; quite right, Frank, I will appoint you as my representative in my absence. You are to execute any and all of Miss Wardour's commands.

"I am ready to do that at any and all times," replied the young man, with sudden gravity, and letting his dark eyes rest for a moment upon the face of the lady in question. And then, without waiting for an answering remark, he turned from the room, followed by his father and the two ladies.

They found Corliss making his final sprawl, and the entire committee of investigation ready with any quantity of newly hatched theories, probable and improbable. Cutting short their eloquence, however, Mr. Lamotte recommended them to talk as little as possible among the townspeople, and to pursue the investigation quietly, after their own light. Then, after a few more words with the fair heiress, father and son took their leave.

Left, alone, Constance sprang lightly out from the open library window, and began pacing the gravelled walk, with a brow wrinkled in thought. Hearing a step behind her, she turned to encounter once more the gaze of Francis Lamotte.

"I beg your pardon," he said, quite humbly. "I was commissioned by Sybil to give you this," extending a dainty white note. "In the excitement of the morning I quite forgot it. Sybil gave me it last evening, asking me to deliver it this morning," and lowering his voice, "knowing it would be for me an exceedingly delightful mission."

Constance took the missive, and twisting it carelessly in her fingers, said:

"Of course, Frank; many thanks. And now, as you are under my commands, I forbid any more flattery and nonsense, sir. I am not in the mood to retort."

"So much the better for me," muttered the young man, moodily. "Constance, I—"

"Silence, sir! Have you not received your orders? My mind is on my losses. If you can think of no way to further our search, I shall dismiss you."

"I have thought of a way, then," he replied, with a touch of dignity. "I think one point has been overlooked. Those robbers have undoubtedly fled the town with their treasure, but it is hardly likely that they went by any very public thoroughfare. Now one, two, or more strangers, travelling across the country, may have been seen by some cottager, farmer, or woodcutter; and I think it would be a mistake to neglect what might give us a clue. Probably the rascals took to their heels during the hours of darkness, making for some small railroad station. Now, I propose to go straightway, mount my horse, and scour the country in search of information. If I find a clue I shall follow it up; and so, if you don't see me by to-morrow morning, Constance, you may know that I have struck the trail."

"Why, Frank," cried Constance, in a burst of outspoken admiration, "I didn't think it was in you! Really, I admire you immensely;

and you will really abandon your ease and comfort for—"

"You."

"No, don't put it in that way; say for justice."

"I don't care a fig for justice!" impatiently. "My motive is purely selfish. If I can be instrumental in recovering your diamonds, may I not hope for some very small reward?"

"To be—sure, Frank. I had overlooked that; a reward of course. I mean to have posters out right away, and—you may as well earn it as anyone."

Francis Lamotte turned swiftly and stood for a moment with bent, averted head; then turning once more toward her a set, white face, he said:

"Even your cruelty shall not prevent me from serving you to the fullest extent of my power. And while I am gone you will receive—" he broke of abruptly, then went on, speaking huskily. "Constance, a girl like you can know little of the life led by a man who is an enigma even to his fellow men. I wish I could teach you to distrust—"

She lifted one hand, warningly. "You can teach me to distrust no one but yourself, Frank; and please don't perpetually talk of me as some unsophisticated schoolgirl. I am twenty-one, nearly as old as you, my child,—old enough, certainly, to form my own judgment of people and things. Don't let's quarrel, Frank; you know I have been taught self-reliance, and never submit to dictation."

"As the queen pleases;" he lifted his hat with a graceful gesture. "Good-morning, Constance," and he turned and strolled rapidly away.

"Frank."

He stopped and turned toward her, but did not retrace his steps.

"Are you really going, *a la Don Quixote?*"

"I really am," gravely.

He lifted his hat once more, and without uttering a word, resumed his rapid walk down the gravelled footpath. Reaching the entrance to the grounds he paused, leaning for a moment against a stone pillar of the gateway; his hands were clenched until the nails left deep indentations in the flesh; his face was ghastly and covered with great drops of perspiration, and, whether the look that shone from his glittering dark eyes betokened rage, or despair, or both, an observer could not have guessed.

Meanwhile, Constance stood as he had left her, gazing after him with a mingled expression of annoyance and regret.

"It was very ungracious of me," she thought, half penitently, "but there is no other way with Frank, and his love-making annoys me exceedingly, especially since Aunt Honor's discovery. How she detests him, and Aunt Honor is too easy to lavish her hate upon many."

As if conjured up by her words, Mrs. Aliston appeared at the window.

"Handsome fellow, isn't he?" that is what her lips said, but the tone and look said quite as plainly, "detestable, abominable, odious." For Mrs. Aliston believed that she had discovered a good reason for disliking Frank Lamotte.

"Don't be exasperating Aunt Honor," retorted Constance, re-entering the window with a slow, languid movement, as if the events of the morning had wearied her vastly. "Everybody has outdone themselves in the disagreeable line, myself included. I wish the burglars had carried me off along with my jewels. I am going up-stairs to try another dose of burglarious chloroform. But, first," dropping into the nearest chair, and assuming a tragic tone, "Let me peruse the letter of my beloved Sybil."

She broke the seal of the dainty envelope, to find that it enclosed another and still smaller one; and on this she read:

Constance, if I did not trust you so fully, I would not dare risk this: Do not open this envelope until sunset of to-morrow (Saturday); the contents will enlighten you as to my reasons for this strangeness *then*.

There was no signature, but the handwriting of Sybil Lamotte was too familiar to be mistaken. And Constance Wardour sat silent and motionless, gazing at the little envelope with such a look of intense gravity upon her face as had not rested there during the entire morning.

Mrs. Aliston, who was a woman of tact, and understood her niece thoroughly, seemed not to have noticed the unopened envelope, and asked for no news from Sybil.

Presently, Constance arose, and, still wearing that weary air and solemn face, crossed the room; with her hand upon the door, she turned her face toward Mrs. Aliston, saying:

"Auntie, you hear about all that's going; did you ever hear that there was a streak of insanity in the Lamotte blood?" And then,

without waiting for the astonished lady to reply, she quietly passed out and up the broad stairs.

CHAPTER IV.

SYBIL'S LETTER.

It is almost sunset, and Constance Wardour is standing alone at her dressing-room window, which faces the west. It is still in confusion, but she cares little for that. Her thoughts are far away from the "Wardour Diamonds" at this moment. Several things have occurred to vex and annoy her to-day, and Constance Wardour, heiress and autocrat, is not accustomed to be annoyed.

In fact, so peculiar is her nature, that very few things have power to annoy her; but, just now, she is annoyed because she *is* annoyed.

"As the queen pleases," Frank Lamotte had said; and all her fair twenty-one years of life events had been ordered "as the queen pleased." She had been taught self-reliance, so she told him; she had inheited self-reliance, she might have said, inherited it along with the rich, strong, fearless blood, the haughtiness, the independence, and the intolerance of the Wardours.

The haughtiness was only for those who presumed, the intolerance for those she despised; and Miss Wardour was quite capable of that strong sentiment, or feeling. The independence was an ever present element of her nature.

Of medium height, she was neither slender nor plump, graceful curves, perfect outlines, faultless gait and gesture; she "slew her tens of thousands," and bore herself like a princess royal toward all.

Without being regularly beautiful, her face is very fair to see. Being, in spite of her haughtiness, most kind and considerate toward inferiors and dependents, and withal exceeding lovable, she is disqualified for a novel heroine by her excessive humanness; and, by that same humanness, eminently qualified to be loved by all who know her, gentle and simple.

Just now her firm little mouth is pursed up, and her brow is wrinkled into a frown, such as never is seen on the face of any orthodox heroine; but her thoughts are very orthodox, as heroines go. She is wondering why Doctor Heath has not made his second appearance at Wardour Place, when she so plainly signified her desire to see him there, again, and soon.

Not that she had bidden him come in so many words; but, had she not looked? had she not smiled? Not that she felt any special interest in Doctor Heath; oh, not at all, only she was bored, and worried, and wanted to be amused, and entertained; and Clifford Heath *could* be entertaining.

Sybil Lamotte's unopened note lies on the dressing-table. She has pondered over that half the afternoon, and has wondered, and guessed, at its meaning; turning over in her mind every explanation probable, and possible, but satisfied with none. She is wonderfully lacking in curiosity, for a woman; but for this she might not have withstood the temptation to anticipate the sunset, for she never has felt so curious about a mystery in her life.

She turns abruptly from the window, and her eyes fall upon Sybil's note, her thoughts return to it again. But it is not quite sunset.

Picking it up, she re-reads for the twentieth time the puzzling lines, then she throws it down impatiently.

"Bah!" she exclaims. "You wretched little white enigma! you are tempting me to forget myself. I shall flee from the fascination of your mysterious face, for I am quite certain that Joshua's chariot is abroad, and the sun is standing still in the skies."

So saying, she goes out, closing and locking the dressing-room door, and descends the stately stairs; at their foot she pauses in full view of the entrance, for there, hat in hand, appears the subject of her recent discontent, Doctor Heath. Surely there must be something depressing in the atmosphere, Constance thinks, as she goes forward to meet him; for his face wears a grave, troubled look not usually seen there.

"Oh, Doctor Heath," she says, half reproachfully, and fabricating after the manner of her sex, "here I have been trying so evoke from my 'inner consciousness' what manner of man your great detective might be. You barely introduced him, and then you flitted; and I do so much dislike the 'To be continued' style."

"So do I," he replies, soberly, as he follows her into the drawing-room. "So much that I shall make the story I have to tell, as brief as maybe. Miss Wardour, have you heard any news from the town—since noon?"

"Not a word," moving across the room, and drawing back the curtain so that the last rays of sunlight fall across the floor. "Is there any news? Have they found a trace of my robbers?"

"For the time being, your robbers are forgotten," smiling slightly. "W—— has had a fresh sensation this afternoon."

"So! and I have become a lesser light? Well, so goes the world! Of course it won't be so interesting as the story of my own woes; but, who is the newest candidate for sensational honours?"

"Your friend, Miss Sybil Lamotte."

Instantly her careless tone changes to one of gravity. For a moment she has forgotten Sybil and her note; now she remembers both, and involuntarily glances out toward the west. The sun is almost gone, but still darts red gleams across the sky. Moving nearer she seats herself, and scans his face a moment, and then, while she motions him to a seat opposite her, says, in that low even tone that is usual to her in all serious moods.

"And what of Sybil Lamotte?" Her eyes search his face; instinctively she knows that something serious has happened; she dreads, yet, with her natural bravery, resolves to hear the worst at once.

"She has—eloped."

"Eloped! But why? Sybil eloped—then it must be with Ray Vandyck," drawing a breath of relief.

"No," gloomily. "It is *not* Raymond Vandyck. That would have been simply a piece of romantic folly, since no one would long oppose Ray, but this—this thing that she has done, is worse than folly, it is crime, madness."

"Not Ray! and yet Sybil lo— Doctor Heath, tell the whole truth, the very worst, quickly."

"Sybil loved Raymond Vandyck, that is what you were about to say, Miss Wardour. You would have betrayed no secret; poor young Vandyck honours me with his confidence. I left him, not half an hour ago, prostrate, half maddened with grief and rage; grief, when he thinks of Sybil lost to him, and fury when he thinks of the man she has chosen. I never saw him; but if the public voice speaks truth, John Burrill is all that is vulgar and corrupt."

"*John Burrill!*" Constance springs to her feet with eyes flashing. "John Burrill! Why, he is a brute; mentally morally, physically, *a brute*. And you couple his name with that of Sybil Lamotte? Doctor Heath, this is an infamous trick. Some one has lied to you. You have never seen him, you say; if you *had* you could not have been duped. *I* know him, as one grows to know any notorious character in a town like this, from seeing him reeling intoxicated through our streets, from hearing of his most startling escapades; a common lounger, a drunkard, a man with a divorced wife in our very midst. Doctor Heath, I know you are incapable of such a jest, but tell me who has caused you to believe a thing so shameful?"

"I thank you for your faith in me," he says, with the shadow of a smile upon his face. "The story is shameful indeed, but it is *true*. Sybil Lamotte has eloped, and with John Burrill. Listen, before you remonstrate. This afternoon at two o'clock, John Burrill, with a swift horse and shining new carriage, drove boldly up to the side entrance of Mapleton Park. There, Sybil Lamotte was awaiting him; he handed her to his carriage and then drove ostentatiously through the town, taking the west road. It appears, that for several days, Burrill had been dropping hints in his sober moments, and boasting openly in his cups, of his coming marriage with one of the belles of W——, and, last evening, he openly avowed that to-day, he should 'carry off Miss Sybil Lamotte, in spite of her high and mighty family, and in the face of all the town.' Of course, no one who heard regarded these things, save as the bombast of a half-drunken braggart and liar. To-day, young Evarts and his still wilder chum, encountered him just setting forth with his fine turnout, and wonderful gotten up. They jested on his fine appearance, and for once he evaded their questions, and seemed anxious to be rid of them. This piqued their curosity, and, ripe for mischief, as usual, they resolved to follow him.

"They were mounted when they met him, having just ridden into town. They saw him stop at Mapleton and take up Miss Sybil, from there they followed them westward. Burrill drove at the height of his horse's speed, and the boys, who followed at a distance, arrived at Milton (you will see their policy in avoiding the railroad towns), ten miles distance, to find that Burrill had changed horses there, and driven away, still westward, at the same break-neck pace. Burrill's horse was badly used up, short as the drive had been, and the man who took it in charge said that the fresh horse was brought there by him, Burrill, yesterday, and that he had heard the lady complain that they 'could not go fast enough.'"

He ceases, and his eyes rest anxiously on her face. She does not seem to have observed that he is not speaking. She has heard every

word, and, somehow, the conviction has been growing even in advance of his story, that it is all true. This will explain Sybil's strange letter, and—that letter! what does it contain? She turns and gazes, as if fascinated, towards the west. There are no more golden gleams athwart the windows, only a dull red flush upon the horizon. The sun, at last, has set.

At last! She turns, rises slowly and without once glancing toward him begins to pace the length of the room, and he sees that the queenly Miss Wardour is for once, unnerved, is struggling for composure.

Finally she speaks, still keeping up her slow promenade.

"Dr. Heath, I am bewildered. I am terrified! I—" She breaks off suddenly, as if to modify her speech. "This can be no common —elopement," she winces at the word. "Sybil is refined, honest, and true-hearted, and she loves—another. There must be something yet to be understood, and," with a sudden startled look in her eyes, "perhaps this might have been prevented; perhaps *I* might have prevented it if—" another break; then, "Doctor, it is just possible that I may find a clue to this strangeness. Will you pardon my absence for a short time, and await me here? This is a strange request, but—"

"It's a day of strange things," he interrupts, kindly, seeing her agitation. "Go, Miss Wardour; I am at your service this evening."

He crosses the room, seats himself at a table, and takes up a book; and Constance stands irresolute for a moment, then, without a word, hurries from the room.

Up the stairs she flies, hastily unlocks her dressing-room door, enters, and, in a moment, with a courage born of a nervous determination to know the worst at once, seizes the mysterious note and breaks the seal. A moment's hesitation, and then the page is opened, and the lines, only a few, dance before her eyes. She tries to steady her hand; she can not read them fast enough.

Constance, Dear Constance:

When you read this, you may have become already aware of the fate I have chosen for myself. I have no explanation to offer. Think of Beauty and the Beast; think of Titania's strange choice; think me mad. But oh, Constance, never censure me; never think that all the happy days, when you have been my friend, I was not worthy that friendship. And, Con., don't let *others* say things too bitter about me. Am I not dead to myself, and to you all? and for the dead, have we not charity only? Constance, I wish I were buried, too.

SYBIL.

P.S.—Con., never let my relatives see this note. They will have enough to bear.

So runs the note.

Half an hour later, Constance Wardour comes quietly into the drawing-room. So quietly that her approach is not observed by Dr. Heath, until her voice breaks the silence, and he starts up from the reverie in which he has been indulging, to see her standing before him, with pale cheeks, and troubled, anxious eyes.

"Has my rudeness been quite unpardonable?" she says, appealingly. "Truly, I have had no idea of the flight of time. I have been sitting up there," motioning toward the upper floor, "stunned, and yet trying to think. I have gained a little self-possession," smiling slightly, as she sinks into a seat, "but not my senses. I thought myself equal to most emergencies, but this is more than an emergency—it is a mystery, a terror! For the first time in my life, I can't think, I can't reason. I don't know what to do!"

It is her turn to speak in riddles; his, not to comprehend. But, being a man, he closes his lips and waits.

"Something terrible has befallen Sybil Lamotte," she goes on, gradually regaining a measure of her natural tone and manner. "I need an adviser, or I had better say, a confidante, for it amounts to that. You know Sybil, and you know poor Ray. You are, I believe, a capital judge of human nature. This morning, just after you left, as you know, Mr. Lamotte and his son called here, and Frank put in my hand this note from Sybil." For the first time he observes the letter which she holds between her two hands. "For reasons stated on the outside of the envelope, which was enclosed in another, I did not break the seal until—now. It may seem like violating Sybil's confidence, but I feel justified in doing what I do. I have no one to advise me, Aunt Honor being worse than myself in a crisis like this; and I believe that both Sybil and I can trust you. Dr. Heath, please read that letter."

He looks at it doubtfully, but does not take it from her extended hand.

"You are sure it is best?" hesitatingly. "You wish it?"

"I wish it," with a touch of her natural imperiousness; "I believe it is best."

Silently he takes the letter from her hand, silently he reads the lines upon the envelope, while she thinks how sensible he is not to have uttered some stereotyped phrase, expressive of his sense of the high honour she does him by giving him so much of her confidence.

Still in silence, he opens and reads the letter, then lays it down and thinks.

At last she grows impatient. "Well," she exclaims, "are you, too, stricken with something nameless?"

He leans toward her, his arm resting upon the table between them, his eyes fixed gravely upon her face.

"Miss Wardour, does your faith in your friend justify you in complying with her wishes?"

"Most assuredly," with a look of surprise.

"In spite of to-day's events?"

"In spite of *anything!*"

He draws a long, sighing breath. "Oh," he says, softly, "it would be worth something to possess *your* friendship. Now—do you really wish for my advice?"

"Have I not asked for it, or rather, demanded it, like a true highwayman?"

"Then here is your case: You have a friend; you trust her fully; nothing can shake your faith in her. Suddenly she does a thing, shocking, incomprehensible, and, in doing it, asks you not to question, for she cannot explain; asks you to think of her kindly; to trust her still. Here is a test for your friendship. Others may pry, drag her name about, torture her with their curiosity; she has appealed to you. Respect her secret. Let her bury it if she will, and can; you cannot help her. If she has become that bad man's wife, she is past human help. Undoubtedly there is a mystery here; undoubtedly she has acted under the control of some power outside herself; but she has taken the step, and—it is *done!*"

She draws a long, sighing breath. "You are right," she says, wearily, "your wisdom is simple, but it *is* wisdom, and I thank you for it; but, oh! if they could have been intercepted. If I could have known—have guessed."

"He smiles oddly. "You do not consider," he says, "how cunningly their plans were laid; doubtless they have been waiting some such opportunity. At twelve o'clock, Mr. Lamotte and wife started for the city."

"In my service, alas!"

"At one, Frank Lamotte mounted his horse and rode eastward."

"Alas! also to serve me."

"At two o'clock, the coast was clear, and the flight commenced. When it became known, search was made for Evan, as the only member of the family within reach of a warning voice. They found him in a beer saloon, in a state of beastly intoxication."

"Oh!"

"Of course he was surrounded by a crowd, eager to see and to hear how he would receive the news; and the work of sobering him up was at once commenced. It took a long time to make him comprehend their meaning, but after a while the name of his sister, coupled with that of John Burrill, brought him staggering to his feet, and a few moments later, a plain statement of the facts, hurled bluntly at him by one of the loungers, sobered him completely. In an instant he had laid his informant sprawling in the saloon sawdust. He declared it a calumny, as you did, and declared war upon the lot of them. Soon kinder hands rescued him from these tormentors, and men he could not doubt convinced him of the truth of the unhappy affair. And then, any who saw would have pitied him. The boy is wild and bad, but he has a heart, and he loves his sister. Poor fellow! he is not all bad."

"Poor Evan!"

"He telegraphed at once to his father, and then set out for Mapleton, looking like the ghost of himself, but carrying a freshly filled flask."

"Of course," mournfully.

"He would have started in pursuit, had they not convinced him of the folly of such an undertaking.

"Folly, indeed, for him."

"And now, Miss Wardour, we have arrived at the end of certainty, and to enter into the field of conjecture is useless. The time may come when some of us may be of actual service to this most unhappy friend of yours. I confess that I wait with some curiosity the movements of her parents in the matter."

"They will take her from him at once. They will buy him off; compel him—anything to get her back."

"Perhaps; but—she may resist them. Think of that letter."

"True. Ah me! I can't think. Doctor Heath, I have kept you here starving. I had forgotten that dinner ever was, or could be.

You shall dine with Aunt Honor and myself; and, for the present, we will not speak of poor Sybil's flight to her. She would run the entire gamut of speculation, for she is very much given to 'seeing through things,' and I can't bear to talk too much on this subject. I should get angry, and nervous, and altogether unpleasant. I say, 'you will stay;' *will* you stay?"

He has never before been invited to dine at Wardour Place, except when the dinner has been a formal one, and the guests numerous; but he accepts this invitation to dine *en famillé*, quite nonchalantly, and as a thing of course.

So he dines at Wardour Place, and talks with Aunt Honor about the robbery, and listens to her description of the splendid Wardour diamonds, and looks at Constance, and thinks his own thoughts.

After dinner Aunt Honor occupies herself with the evening paper, and, after a while, Constance and Doctor Heath pass out through the low, broad French window, and stand on the balcony. The light from within falls upon them and that portion of the balcony where they stand. There is a young moon, too; and just beyond is a monster oak, that spreads its great branches out, and out, until they rustle, and sway above the lower half of the long balcony, and rap and patter against the stone walls.

"Have you thought," asks Constance, as she leans lightly against the iron railing, "that to-morrow is Sunday, and that Mr. Lamotte, unless he has already returned, cannot reach home until Monday?"

"It has occurred to me."

"And poor Sybil! Where will she be by then?"

"Miss Wardour! What disinterestedness! I thought you were thinking of your detective."

"My detective! Why, what a lot of stupid people! He might as well not come at all. Why didn't you tell me to telegraph at once?"

"Because Mr. Lamotte was coming. I depended upon him."

"And he has made a blunder."

"Not necessarily."

"Why?"

"He may have seen an officer immediately, the man may be now on the way, by the night train. He will be sure to be here before Monday, or he is no detective. They depend very little on the regular trains."

"Oh; I'm enlightened! All the same, I shall never see my diamonds more."

"You don't seem much troubled."

"Pride, all pride! I'm heartbroken."

"You are a most *nonchalant* young lady."

"Yes, it's contagious."

They both laugh, and relapse into silence. Presently, she says:

"We are sure to have the wrong man. Why did you not tell me the name of your great detective, so that I might have commissioned Mr. Lamotte to bring him? That man has been in my mind all day. You have made me enamoured of him."

"Why?" laughing indulgently: "I barely mentioned him."

"No matter; you say he is a splendid officer?"

"There is no better. I know of none as good."

"And his name?"

"A very romantic one: Neil J. Bathurst."

"Why!" stepping suddenly to the window. "Aunt Honor!"

"Well," replies Mrs. Aliston, from behind her newspaper.

"What is the name of your wonderful detective, who brought those two murderers from Europe, and had them properly hung?"

"Mr. Neil Bathurst. Why, my dear?"

"Oh, nothing special, auntie;" then returning to the window, "Auntie never loses trace of a crime or a trial in high life. I have heard her talk of this man's splendid exploits by the hour. She is a walking catalogue in all aristocratic sensations. So this is your great man? Well, if he is in the city, we must have him. Mr. Lamotte shall bring his man, or send him: there should be work for two. As for me, I intend to secure the services of Mr. Neil J. Bathurst."

"He may not be within reach; he is constantly moving, and always busy."

"No matter. I tell you I want to see this man."

"That being the case, I may as well present myself."

They started at the sound of a strange voice near them. There is a rustling of leaves, and from one of the great oak's extended branches, a form swings downward, and drops lightly upon the grass, just before the place where they stand.

"Who are you?" demands Doctor Heath, sternly, as the eavesdropper approaches. "And what does this impertinence mean?"

Before they can think, the man approaches the balcony, puts his hands upon the railing,

and springs lightly over; standing in the full light that falls from within, he doffs his hat like a courtier, and bending before Constance, says, in a voice that is, for a man, singularly rich and mellow:

"Madame, I am here at your service. I am Neil J. Bathurst."

CHAPTER V.

THE DEDUCTIONS OF A DETECTIVE.

BOTH Constance and Dr. Heath fancy that they comprehend the situation almost instantaneously. The stranger's movements have been so catlike, his voice so carefully modulated, that Aunt Honor reads on, never dreaming that an addition has been made to the party. Dr. Heath is the first to speak.

"Upon my word," he says, with a touch of coldness in his tone; "this is quite dramatic."

"It's a very good tableau," admits the new comer, "but dramatic as the present day drama goes? No, it's too naturally brought about, as you will admit, when I explain my presence here. Your mention of my name, while I lay sprawled across the great branch, within easy hearing, was rather sensational, to me, but, of course, you can explain that."

By this time Constance has recovered herself, and rises to the occasion; in fact, she rather enjoys the situation; this is one of the emergencies wherein she is quite at home. Without stopping for commonplace remarks, or expressions of surprise, she goes straight to the point.

"How we came to be discussing you, you must understand, if you are really Mr. Bathurst, and—have been very long in that tree."

"I have been 'very long' in that tree, I feel it," ruefully. "And I *am* Neil Bathurst, detective; never was anybody else, and by the by, here is this doctor; I heard him giving me a capital 'recommend;' now bid him step up and identify me," and he laughs as if he had uttered a capital joke.

Doctor Heath laughs now, as he comes closer and scrutinizes him by the light from the drawing-room.

"Oh, I recognise you by your voice, which you have not attempted to disguise, and by your—a—assurance."

"I thought so!" rubbing his hands with a satisfied air.

"But that physiognomy, I never saw before."

The detective laughs.

"No, this is one of my business faces, and you, sir, are one of the few who have known me simply as a man, without reference to my occupation; a man like me may be expected to turn up anywhere, but you, sir, are the last man I expected to see in this place."

"Nevertheless, I have been an inhabitant of W—— for a year; but enough of me for the present. Mr. Bathurst, this lady is Miss Wardour, in whose service you have been retained."

Miss Wardour extends a gracious, welcoming hand.

"Mr. Bathurst has heard me express my desire to know him," she says, with a little ripple of laughter, "so no more need be said on the subject. Mr. Bathurst you came as opportunely as a fairy godmother; and now let us go in and take my aunt into our counsels."

She lifts the lace curtains and passes in; as she goes, Dr. Heath lays a detaining hand on the detective's arm.

"Mr. Bathurst," he whispers; "in W—— I am Dr. Heath, from nowhere."

"I comprehend," significantly.

"Thank you;" then they two pass through the window, and the detective goes through the ordeal of presentation to Aunt Honor.

Mrs. Aliston, being a thorough woman, who knows her perquisites, gets through with the necessary amount of astonishment, ejaculations, questionings, and expressions of delight; all things are overcome by time, even a woman's volubility. And during the flow of her discourse the detective is communing thus with his "inner consciousness:"

"So we have been retained by this handsome young lady? Well, that's intelligence! and what does the old lady mean by supposing that Mr. Lamotte has told me this and that? Who the deuce is Lamotte? Why the deuce don't somebody ask me how I came to be perched in that tree? Do they think it's the proper thing for detectives to tumble in among them out of the trees and the skies? After all, it is like a drama, for I'll be blessed if I see any sense in it all."

"I see you are all more or less attracted by my personal appearance," he says, after Aunt Honor has given up the floor. "Now that I think of it, it's *not* just the thing for a drawing-room."

Mr. Neil Bathurst, or his present presentment, is a medium sized man, attired in

garments that have once been elegant, but are now frayed, threadbare, travel worn; his feet are encased in boots that have once been jaunty; his hat is as rakish as it is battered; his face wears that dull reddish hue common to fair complexions that have been long exposed to sun and wind; his hair and beard, somewhat matted, somewhat disordered, may have borne some tinge of auburn or yellow once, but they, too, have unmistakably battled with the sun, and have come out a light hay-colour. As Constance looks at him, she, mentally, confesses that he *is* certainly the oddest figure she has ever entertained in her drawing-room.

"I have been wondering just what grade of humanity you are supposing yourself to represent just now," says Doctor Heath, eyeing him quizzically.

"What!" with mock humility, "am I thus a failure? Miss Wardour, look at me well; do you not recognise my social rank?"

Constance surveys him afresh, with critical eye.

"I think," she says, "I recognise the gentleman tramp; one of the sort who asks to wash his face before eating, and to chop your wood after."

"Right!" says the detective. "My self-respect returns; I am *not* a bungler. In the morning I shall be on the ground, to wash my face, and chop your wood; which reminds me. Your servants, they must not see me here. I must depart as I came, and soon."

"And your search," asks Constance, "when will that begin?"

"My search?" hesitating oddly. "Oh, that has already commenced."

"What a curious thing it is that Mr. Lamotte should have secured you, of all men," breaks in Aunt Honor. "I did not think it possible Mr. Lamotte—"

"Pardon me, all of you," breaks in the gentleman tramp. "Something must be set right: I will come to the point at once. Who *is* Mr. Lamotte? *What* is Mr. Lamotte? I have never seen him; never heard of him."

"What!" from Constance.

"Oh!" from Mrs. Aliston,

"But—" from Doctor Heath.

"Let me finish," he interpolates. "Let me tell you just how I happened to drop down among you to-night. Recently we have had in the city several robberies similar to this of yours, Miss Wardour, as I understand it. Several times we have had a trace or clue, and have hoped to find the robbers, but so far have been baffled. We must necessarily have many ways of gathering up information, and I have some methods of my own. This is one of them. I have access to the offices of our daily papers. I have a friend or tool in each. When a special telegram, in the line of criminal intelligence, comes to one of these papers, I am in possession of its contents before it has reached the compositor's hands. This morning a 'special' arrived at the office of the *Evening Bulletin*. I have not with me a copy. It ran:

MONSTER DIAMOND ROBBERY.

[Special dispatch to the Evening Bulletin.]

Intelligence has this moment been received, that Wardour Place has been burglarized; and the splendid Wardour diamonds, valued at more than one hundred thousand dollars, stolen, besides money and papers of value. No particulars as yet.

"This is what brought me here. I came to see if this burglary was the handiwork of the thieves I have been trying to catch. I came solely on my own responsibility, not intending to make myself known to the inmates of this house, but to ferret out things quietly and go my way. While lurking in that tree I was surprised to hear myself made the subject of conversation; and then, impulse led me to respond to this lady's expressed desire to see me, and—I presented myself."

All sit silent, all are astonished, and inclined to think this odd complication out quietly.

Constance is the first to see the absurdity of the situation, and she breaks into a peal of laughter, in which she is presently joined by the others. Finally, she regains her composure and says:

"And so after all you are not our detective. Well, that shall not prevent us from appropriating your services. And you want to identify these robbers, if possible? We are all at your disposal—tell us how we can help you most."

"You came with scant information," says Doctor Heath, "and you can't have been here long, but I'll wager you have picked up something."

"As to that," replies the detective, smiling slightly, "I left the city by the early afternoon express, before your Mr. Lamotte had arrived, you see. Twelve miles from W—— I left the train and boarded a freight; about three miles out I abandoned the freight, quite un-

ceremoniously, while she was pulling up a heavy grade, and tramped into town. I lounged about, confining myself to the more obscure streets, until I had got the story of the robbery, with full particulars, as far as the gossips knew it. Toward sundown I started in this direction. Stopping on the way, I begged a drink of water and a slice of bread, of an old woman in a little brown house. She thought me a very well-behaved tramp, and inquired after my private history and the condition of my soul."

Constance laughs.

"That is old Mrs. Malloy," she says. "She's very pious and very full of gossip."

"Precisely!" replies the detective, wickedly; "she told me how many lovers you had, Miss Wardour; and how many dresses; and just the colour of your eyes, and hair; she told me all about the robbery, and a great many more things that were not quite to the point."

"Of course," assents Miss Wardour, not at all abashed. "Mrs. Malloy is an oracle."

"As soon as I could make my escape from her, I came nearer Wardour Place, and made a circuitous survey. Still later, I came upon your gardener, sitting, ruminating, upon a stone fence, in the rear of the premises. I found him inclined to be communicative; in fact, he seemed rather desirous to air his notions, and he has some peculiar ones, concerning this robbery. I gave him a drink out of my black bottle, and he grew quite eloquent."

"Oh, dear," interrupts Constance once more. "Then, no doubt, he has pruned away half the garden shrubs. Old Jerry always *is* seized with a desire to prune things, the moment he has taken a drink."

"It was getting too dark for pruning, Miss Wardour, and he went to his supper. Then, I approached the kitchen cautiously, found a comfortable lurking-place, close to an open window, and listened to the table talk of the servants. From them I learned the bearings of the library, and so, while you were at dinner, I entered without difficulty, and have explored that room to my entire satisfaction."

Amazement sits on the face of all three listeners.

"Well!" ejaculates Dr. Heath. "You are a modest tramp! What did you do next?"

"Next I prowled 'round and round the house,' examining all the windows, and drawing some conclusions; and then, having seen you, Doctor Heath, through the drawing-room windows, I established myself in yonder tree to wait until you should go home, and to waylay you."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," says the Doctor, gratefully. "What demoniac design had you on my defenceless self?"

"Several: to appeal to your hospitality; to renew an acquaintance, which in the beginning did me honour; and to quiz you unmercifully."

"Then I forgive you," grandiloquently. "And my doors are open to you, and my hand is extended, and the secrets of my bosom are laid bare. But Miss Wardour has something to say; I see it trembling on her lips.

"Right," smiles Constance. "I was about to ask if Mr. Bathurst, having effected his object thus far independently, will be satisfied to inspect my dressing-room, the real scene of action, in the ordinary manner and without any obstacles in the way."

"Perfectly," says the detective, dropping his tone of badinage and becoming alert and business-like at once. "And the sooner the better. I am anxious to complete my deductions, for my time is limited, and I must wait for daylight to overlook the grounds more closely than I could venture to do to-day."

"We are all anxious for your opinion, and so, will you take one of those lamps and my keys, or will you have an escort?"

"I wish you to point out to me the exact position of everything this morning, Miss Wardour. I think we may all go up."

"So they all ascended to the disordered dressing-room, and the detective seats himself, deliberately, upon the first unoccupied chair, and begins to look slowly about him. It is not a long survey, and then the safe is examined. Here he looks at Constance.

"This has not been done without noise; not loud enough to be heard across the hall, perhaps, but enough to be heard by a light sleeper, or, indeed, any one who did not sleep too soundly and with muffled ears, say, in that room," pointing through the curtained arch which divided the dressing from the sleeping room.

"Did you sleep there, Miss Wardour?"

Constance nods, then goes through the arch and returns with a little phial of chloroform, and a fragment of cambric in her hand.

She places them before him, telling him quietly how they were found before her that morning. The detective takes them, turns

them over in his hand, and examines them closely.

"Ah!" he exclaims, drawing out the fancifully carved stopper, "this phial is one of a set."

Doctor Heath nods. "So I thought," he says, glancing at Constance.

Once more, and in silence, the detective examines the safe, then he goes quietly about the room, not overturning or handling, simply observing closely; then he says:

"Now, I think I am done here. We will go down, if you please, and I will give you the benefit of my conjectures." He puts the bottle and the piece of linen in his pocket, and turns from the room. Instinctively he takes the lead, instinctively they follow, naturally according him the leadership.

When they are once more seated, he turns to Constance.

"They gave you a very light dose of chloroform, Miss Wardour."

"Very light," she replies; "and that was most fortunate for me."

"How fortunate?"

"Allow me to explain," interrupts Doctor Heath. "Miss Wardour possesses one of those peculiar constitutions upon which all opiates act with disastrous effect. It is fortunate that a cautious hand,—I was about to say a skilled hand,—administered the drug. I could swear that not the half of an ordinary dose was given her, for a full dose would have prostrated her for days; and the quantity it would require to make you or me sleep soundly for half the night, would kill her outright."

"Ah!" says the detective, softly to himself. "Ah-h-h!"

"Now I wonder:" it is Mrs. Aliston who speaks. "I *wonder* how in the world you knew that they had given my niece only a small dose."

"Very easily, madame. The phial is very small, and it is now over two-thirds full."

"That, indeed!" murmurs Mrs. Ailston, feeling somehow extinguished, while the others smile at his simple explanation.

"And now," says the detective, "for my deductions. First, then, the robbers did not enter these grounds last night for the first time. They did not enter the library at random, or because that window could be easily forced. They, whoever they were, knew their grounds, not only from without, but from within. The disturbance in the library is only a ruse,—the robbers wanted nothing, knew they should find nothing, there. They were not amateurs; yet, somehow, in this case, they bungled somewhat in their work. Before they approached this house, everything was planned, and all was done as planned. They were systematic, therefore successful; and yet—they bungled. They came by the river, —came in a boat, with oars muffled; they came by the footpath over the river slope, and entered your garden by leaping the fence just below the gate, which was locked. Then they followed the footpaths through the shrubbery, and straight to that library window. They came there because they knew it to be the library window, and they wished to cross the library because they knew that from the door of that room they stepped at once upon the stairs, thus having the nearest, easiest, and safest route to Miss Wardour's rooms. Either they found her door unlocked, or they were prepared with skeleton keys. Was the door locked, Miss Wardour?"

"It was locked."

"It was locked. They then used a skeleton key, entered, and knowing just the proportion of chloroform Miss Wardour could bear, they administered it carefully, secured the booty without further trouble, and made their escape without detection."

No remarks from his listeners. They sit amazed, incredulous, admiring, yet speechless.

"Now, I see I had better prove my statements," goes on Mr. Bathurst, looking from one to another with a smile of easy superiority. "Miss Wardour is begining to think that I *do* belong to the godmother species, and yet, it's all very simple."

"No doubt," retorts Doctor Heath, drily; "yet we are willing to endure your simple explanation."

"I say the robbers came by the river," continues the detective. "Before sundown I sauntered along the river bank; to-morrow I can show you traces, indistinct but sufficient, to prove that a boat has been drawn out of the water, and overturned upon the grass; keel, prow, and oar-locks have left their traces. There is also the print of a clubbed and muffled oar, above the water mark, where an impatient hand has pushed of the boat. Here is blunder number one. All these traces might have been avoided or obliterated."

He pauses a moment, but his listeners sit, a very respectful audience, and are inclined neither to question or argue. So he continues:

"I said that the robbers entered purposely at that particular window, and because they were familiar with the interior of the house. Now I have examined all of the windows of this floor, and I find that a person unfamiliar with the inside of the building, and not aware which of the upper rooms were occupied, would have chosen differently. The dining-room windows, from without, would seem more inviting; still more the drawing-room windows. Naturally, our burglars would select a window which was tolerably easy of access, and where they knew there was the least chance of being overheard and observed from above. Now, the dining-room windows are close to the ground, and the awnings cut off all chance for observation from above; but—they knew that Miss Wardour's coachman sleeps in a small room just in the rear of the dining-room."

This was too much for Mrs. Aliston.

"Now, how *did* you find that out?" she asks, with staring eyes.

"From my friend, the gardener," he replies. "Oh, I am quite familiar with things about here. The very best place for a burglar to operate would be these windows," motioning toward the front of the drawing-room; "he could stand in comfort on the lower balcony, screened by the upper, and cut away at shutters and panes; but, our burglars knew that Miss Wardour's rooms were directly above, and that Miss Wardour is a light sleeper. Now, the very place that would be shunned by an unfamiliar robber is this very library window; it is higher than the others, has a little thicket of shrubs just beneath it, and is overlooked from above, being near an angle, by six windows. But our burglars knew that not one of those rooms to which the six windows belong, are occupied, and that the servants all sleep on the opposite side of the house. Now, then, I say that the robbers knew Miss Wardour's sensitiveness to the effects of chloroform; how else can we account for the fact of their giving just enough to cause her to sleep, and not enough to cause any unpleasant after effects. We can call it a coincidence, but it is one not very likely to happen; Doctor Heath knows that."

"True," responds Doctor Heath; "in a matter of this sort one would hardly be likely to make so fortunate a blunder, or guess."

The detective pauses a moment, and then concludes: "My reasons for saying that the robbers entered the garden by leaping the low fence just below the gate, are, first, that gate creaks loudly when opened or shut, and they knew this, and therefore avoided it; and, second, one of them, the heavier of the two, came over with sufficient force to leave the imprint of his right boot heel in the ground. It was the right heel, because the deepest side of the indentation is to the right, and he would naturally strike the ground with the weight resting on the outside of the foot; and here, my friends, as the lawyers have it, I rest my case."

"And a very clear case it looks," says Doctor Heath.

"How easily and naturally you come at these things," exclaims Constance, in admiration. "It is a, b, c, to you, but its awful Greek to the rest of us. I begin to think detectives are born, not made."

"You think right, Miss Wardour," replies Bathurst. "It is the made detectives who spoil and disgrace our profession."

"But," says Constance, with a look of anxiety upon her face; "I am sorry to have it proved that this thing was done by some of our people. I am reluctant to institute a search that may implicate some poor man whose wife and children may live in our very town."

The detective laughs softly.

"There it is," he exclaims. "An amateur must always judge by what appears uppermost. We detectives, as a rule, always distrust the most plausible theory. Now, look: a skilled burglar is a man of many resources; a burglar studies his business as I study mine. You have no idea how much misapplied talent goes roaming about of nights with a jimmy and a dark lantern. Now let us suppose this case. A professional burglar in the course of his wanderings hears, as would be quite natural, of the immense value of the Wardour diamonds, and he desires to possess them. Now, it's a great prize, and he goes to work with his utmost care. He has confederates; they come, one or all, and manage to gain the necessary information; they may come as tramps, pedlars, what not; a talkative servant, a gossiping neighbour like Mrs. Malloy, or fragments of information picked up here and there may help them to get the 'lay of the land;' they may even have entered the house, probably have, and it may have been last month, or last year; our burglar nourishes his job and studies it carefully. Finally he is ready; he strikes; he succeeds. I do not say this is the case, understand; I simply put it as a thing possible, and quite as probable as that the thieves are here in W——."

Constance muses; she is thinking of various other depredations committed in and about W——; and, as once before she recounted them to Doctor Heath, she enumerates them now, and closes by saying:

"Your burglars keep a sharp eye on us, at all events, Mr. Bathurst."

"Naturally," assents the detective; "W—— is a capital field for that sort of chap. It's a little mine of itself, and will always receive due attention from the law-breakers. By the by, Miss Wardrour, these facts you mention are worth noting; after considering, I think I will remain in W—— during to-morrow. I want to explore about the river, and about this place, a little more. If I may see you to-morrow I would like your version of these other older robberies. I keep a record of every crime reported, and, no doubt, have each of these upon my register, but not as I would receive them from you. I do not wish to be seen or known as acting in this matter; your friend will be here to-morrow, or Monday, and the officer he has chosen should be on the ground before to-morrow morning. No doubt he will be all that you wish for, and my duties will call me elsewhere very soon."

Then they all rise, and standing in a group begin talking. They so much regret that they cannot retain his services, and they are very grateful to him for so much light as he has thrown upon the subject of the robbery.

"But wait," he says, "you are to bear in mind that you *have* no light; you are in total darkness and ignorance; to-morrow you will have a new officer, he may evolve a totally different theory. Then discard mine, or not, as you think fit; in any case, let it be kept exclusively to your three selves, for I am very likely to make a second appearance here. I think that these burglars of yours are the chaps I am wanting. And, Miss Wardour, this reminds me, drawing from his pocket the chloroform vial wrapt in its accompanying linen bit, "may I keep this until morning? I will return it to you by Doctor Heath, and, if your officer is not too much in the way, will try and see you in person, if you will kindly give me what facts you can recall concerning those robberies."

Constance expresses a hope that the officer will not be in the way, and after they have talked a little more, the detective repeating his cautions, Constance repeating her regret that he is not to take the case, as *her* case; and Mrs. Aliston repeating everything that comes into her head, they separate, and the two men, looking so oddly unlike, go out into the night.

Mrs. Aliston is ready to talk, but Constance is in no mood to listen. She cuts short her aunt's elocution, and goes with listless weariness to her own apartments.

Since the appearance of the detective, a shade of perplexity rested on her face, and over and again her thoughts have repeated the question which now falls from her lips.

"What does it mean? I am not mistaken; he said, 'Here, I am Doctor Heath from nowhere.' I begin to think that life is a mystery."

For, Miss Wardour, hesitating a moment as she passed in from the balcony, had caught the words uttered for the ears of the detective only.

CHAPTER VI.

DOCTOR HEATH AT HOME.

Doctor Heath and the detective went in silence down the wide shrub-bordered walk, to the spot where the doctor's horse awaited him. Here the detective paused suddenly and listened a moment.

"We should not be seen together," he said in a low tone. "Do you mount your horse and ride on slowly, I will follow."

"But——"

"No buts; I can follow you, never fear; that's my business; do you go straight home and prepare to admit me on the quiet. Stay—have you any gelatine?"

"No."

"Any plaster of Paris?"

"No."

"Any wax?"

"Only a small quantity."

"Too bad; I must have some. There will be a drug store open?"

"At this hour? oh, yes."

"Then get me some, half a pound at least. Now move on, I hear a horse coming down the road."

"Some farmer going home. Well, I'm off, then."

"And so am I."

Half an hour later Doctor Heath was standing in his open doorway, wondering what had become of the detective, when a light touch upon his shoulder caused him to start suddenly, and turning, he saw the man for whom he watched, standing behind him, and within the dimly-lighted hall.

"Are we alone?" whispered the detective; "is the coast clear?"

"Quite clear; but how the mischief did you get in there, man?"

"Through the door," replied Bathurst, as he followed his host into a cosy parlour, where a shaded lamp burned. "You are not a good sentinel; why, I all but brushed you; have you no sense of feeling, then? Why, man, I can recognise a near presence in the darkest room."

"Now that I think of it," retorts the doctor, maliciously, "I did feel a queer sensation in the ends of my thumbs. Make yourself at home now; take that chair," rolling a comfortable-looking monster close to the round table; "there are segars and—why—I say man, have you eaten anything since you started on this chase?"

"Now you mention it, I distinctly recollect that I have not."

"Of course not; I will wake up Mrs. Gray."

"Pray don't; I couldn't think of eating Mrs. Gray."

"Nonsense!" laughs his host; "Mrs. Gray is my housekeeper, and she is deaf as a post."

"Well, that's a comfort, the deafness. Is she dumb, too?"

"Unfortunately, no; but as I have not been home to dine, she will think she is preparing my supper, and I will tell her you are a patient come to be treated, and that I am going to give you a bed; here," tossing something which he finds upon a bookcase, across to his guest, "tie your face up in that rag, before she comes in. She will not give you a second glance; she never troubles her head about my patients."

So saying, he goes out, and the detective proceeds to spread out the "rag," to prepare his bandage. Suddenly he starts, scrutinizes closer, turns it about, and looks again, then—

"Ah!" says Mr. Bathurst; "Oh! really!"

And he folds up his bandage, and puts it in one pocket, whips a clean pocket handkerchief from another, and substituting it for the "rag," awaits the coming of his host.

"Very comfortable quarters," he muttered, looking about him, "Luxurious too; quite so. Our doctor has not forgotten how people ought to live."

The doctor's quarters were all that he described them. Luxurious, comfortable; and luxury and comfort do not always go hand in hand; tasteful, too. Nothing too much; nothing lacking—just the beau-ideal of a bachelor's parlour. Warm browns brightening here and there into bronze. Books, a great many and of the best. Pictures, a very few, and all rare and beautiful. Bronzes and statuettes in plenty. Bric-a-brac, not any, for no fair and foolish woman has trailed her skirts through these apartments, leaving traces of her presence in the shape of those small and costly abominations, yclept "ceramics."

Presently Doctor Heath reappears, and not long after, Mrs. Gray bears in a heaped-up tray of edibles. Then Doctor Heath sets forth brandy and wine, and informs Mrs. Gray, through the medium of his ten fingers, that she is dismissed for the night.

When she has retired the detective unties his face, and falls upon the food spread before him, as a hungry man will. While he eats he talks a little, just a random remark now and then, and his host sits opposite him, answering his infrequent questions and observations, and thinking.

In past days, and under very different circumstances, these two men have met and known each other, and Doctor Clifford Heath is wondering how much of his story it will be necessary to tell, in order to explain his present position, which, he knows, must seem a most strange one to his former acquaintance; for Doctor Clifford Heath, like most of us who have not passed a vegetable existence, has a history, and a past.

Of that fact, however, Mr. Bathurst seems quite oblivious, as he washes down his repast with a glass of brandy and water, and pushes back his chair from the table.

"Now, then," he begins, with his usual brisk business manner, "I'm rested and refreshed, and all ready for that white wax, if you please, Doctor Heath."

"I'm quite curious about that wax," says the doctor, rising. "Just let me draw away this table and bring up another, it's the easiest way of disposing of the dinner things, and will furnish Mrs. Gray with food for comfortable comment; she takes all such opportunities to disparage 'men's ways,' and as she seems to enjoy them, I make it a point to afford her as many as possible," making the proposed change as he talks. "Now, then, there's a table, and there's your wax."

"Now something to melt it in and over: I'm going to take an impression."

There is a little difficulty about getting the necessary articles together, but after a while

they are all there, and the wax is simmering in the melting-cup. Then the detective takes from his pocket the borrowed bottle of chloroform, and asks for an empty vial. This being given him, he pours out the chloroform carefully, and wipes the emptied bottle.

"It's a pity I can't keep this bottle just as it is," he says, eyeing the cut-glass stopper regretfully, "but it must be returned, of course, and I must do the next best. What's your notion of the original use of that little gimcrack?"

He reaches out the bottle and the doctor takes it in his hand, saying: "Why, it's from one of those dainty toilet-cases used by ladies principally; there will be a set, uniform in size, that are filled with perfumes of various sorts, and larger bottles, of the same pattern, for goodness knows what use. I have seen the kind, but not the pattern."

"Well," says the detective, slowly, "I *think* that I have seen the pattern; but where? However," dipping a stick into the melting wax, "I shall find out, and before very long."

"I wonder," says Doctor Heath, stretching out his hand for a fresh segar, "at the fellows leaving such a testimonial as that behind them. What's your theory?"

"I have expected that question from both yourself and Miss Wardour. I am glad she did not ask me."

"Why?"

The detective takes a spoon and dips up his wax, letting it drip from the spoon, drop by drop. It is ready for use, and without seeming aware of the doctor's presence, he busies himself with his impression-taking—seeing which, Doctor Heath smokes on, and is silent.

Finally, his mould is set to cool, and the detective resumes his seat; and, quite ignoring that long neglected monosyllable of inquiry, uttered by his host, begins:

"When the burglars,—for, no doubt, there were two of them,—entered Miss Wardour's dressing-room, they carried one dark lantern. This, one of them took, and crept with it into the sleeping-room; here, he was, for a moment, troubled. He had prepared himself with the chloroform, but must use his own handkerchief, and that is marked."

"Oh! a burglar with marked linen."

"Even so. It's nothing unusual. You reason like a reader of too many novels. Burglars are not all escaped convicts, blear-eyed and hideous; nor do they all go about in fustian. It's the burglar in broadcloth that makes us the trouble. Fustian starves, and steals, and is soon found out; runs away with its booty, as a dog runs away with its bone. Broadcloth is wiser, just as a skilled workman is wiser than a hod-carrier. It brings to its service tact, study,—who knows what, of scientific skill? It looks before it leaps; it plans before it executes; and it covers up all traces of its progress, or else leaves a network of false clues and misleading evidences. Bah! if we had only fustian to deal with, it would not be worth while to be a detective."

"Granted," says the doctor, drumming impatiently upon the table, with the fingers of his strong, white, right hand. "We have to deal with a broadcloth burglar, who marks his linen, and, perhaps, perfumes it. *Was* it perfumed? I forgot."

"It was not perfumed. I wish it had been. Yes, ours is a broadcloth burglar. When he approached Miss Wardour's bedside, he produced from a convenient pocket his stupefying drug; and then he looked about for something with which to apply it, and at the same time, no doubt, he berates himself for omitting to provide himself with a plain small napkin, or piece of linen. There was nothing at hand that was not too large for his purpose, and too coarse, for he understood the delicacy of his undertaking. So, he produced his pocket handkerchief, which, as I said before, was marked; he tears off the half bearing the name, but, in his haste, does not observe that he has left evidence that the name was there. He then saturated the linen, and set the bottle upon the night-stand, leaving his two hands free to apply his drug with utmost care. Then he pauses for a moment, to note the effect of his application, or to gaze upon the fair sleeper. And then comes a sound from the outer room, an impatient call, the click of steel implements, no matter what,—he snatches up the dark lantern and, forgetting the bottle, goes out to his comrade."

"You believe there were two?"

"Yes; there were two. These affairs are seldom operated by one man?"

"You said this evening that they had blundered. It seems to me that they made a very neat job of the affair."

"They did blunder. It does look like a neat job to a non-professional, but they have left several flaws in their work. They felt very confident of future safety, I am sure, for they were shrewd fellows; that's established

in my mind. There's a something about this case that puzzles me, and some queer ideas are drifting through my head, but for the present I shall keep them there. About those blunders now. That boat business was the first. There's plain proof; then look at the manner in which they stirred up the library. Why, man, didn't you reflect that those heavy chairs never could have been overturned by a hasty, careless hand, without coming down with a loud bang? and there are three of them, all thrown down in different positions; every one of them was lowered slowly, carefully. Why, look at that pile of books upon the floor! Do you imagine they were ever tossed down from their shelves, as they appear to have been, without striking upon the floor, or each other, with a thud? I can see the whole operation; one man held the lantern while the other disarranged the room. But they did not do it well. That much of the business looks like the work of an amateur. Perhaps you wonder why I did not speak of this to Miss Wardour. I said enough to convince her that I had studied the matter; I did not wish to exhaust the subject, that is the business of the man who is to come. And now I think I will remove my cast, and then, my dear fellow, I am quite ready to retire, for I feel the need of all the sleep I can get between now and sunrise."

"Shocking confession," laughs the doctor, lazily. "Let me tell you it's highly improper for a detective to get sleepy, or hungry, or tired; they never do it in print."

"Which should convince you that they always do out of it. Detectives, my dear sir, are like doctors, their success depends upon the people's faith in them, not on their own merits. Now I know that you can't see through the anatomy of old Mrs. Grundy, and tell what she had for dinner, unless, to be sure, she had been eating onions; but if Mrs. Grundy doubted for a moment your ability to don your professional spectacles and peer into the innermost depths of her disordered old being, she would write another name than yours on her books, as favourite physician."

"Guide, philosopher and friend," quotes the doctor, composedly, "Let Mrs. Grundy alone, will you; she is one of my best customers."

"She is not one of my worst, but the world is not *quite* filled up with Mrs. Grundys, else our fortunes were soon made; for instance, up at Wardour Place to night, that seraphic old lady was prepared to receive all my statements, as Mrs. G—— takes your pills, on faith. But the young lady; oh, no! She has too much head for a woman."

"Why, for a woman?"

"Not got scope enough. 'Woman's kingdom' too small for her; too much top to her head; brow too broad; eyes too full; won't believe a thing is true, because you say it is true; got to convince her reason. Such people make chaps like you and me lots of bother; won't take us for granted."

"Granted we wish them to."

"Bah! Of course we wish them to. Everybody wants to be taken on trust; but there, we can waive this discussion; Miss Wardour will find occupation for that head of hers for a time at least. My head must rest."

"I should think so; you are as full of whimsies as ever, when off duty, and since to-night I accept you as a detective, *a la* 'Mrs. Grundy,' just follow me now, Sir Tramp. By the way, how will you get out of here in the morning?"

"Leave that to me. By the way, don't disturb my wax-work. I will leave the bottle and linen; do you restore them to Miss Wardour to-morrow at the earliest hour possible to a caller. I shall present myself in my own time and way, governed, of course, by circumstances, and it is probable that you will not see me again for some time. Therefore let me say, thanks for your hospitality. Call on me when you want a service, and good night."

So saying he vanishes into an inner room, the door of which the doctor has just now thrown invitingly open. As the door closes quickly, and in his very face, Clifford Heath stares blankly at it, and for a moment stands so, looking half bewildered.

Finally, a look of amusement crosses his face, and he returns slowly to his seat beside the table, slowly selects a segar, and slowly lights it.

"There's a queer customer," muses he, as he settles himself for a comfortable meditation. "He can go to sleep in the very teeth of mystery, and wake up, clear-headed, in a fog. Now I can't sleep, and I've been awake longer than my allotted time, too. Shades of my ancestors! What a day! And, oh, my prophetic soul, what will it bring forth? Well, Doctor Clifford Heath, *as* Doctor Clifford Heath, what is it to you? You have been honoured by the confidence of Constance

Wardour. What then? There was no one else in whom she could confide; may she not honour your judgment without coveting your adoration. Bah! the very fact that she confides in you proves that she cares nothing for you. However, she has a heart for somebody; that is proved by her agitation upon hearing the story, and reading the letter telling of poor Sybil Lamotte's misery. For undoubtedly in some manner she has been made a victim. Can it be that wretched Evan? His agitation to-day bore the look of remorse, and God knows where dissipation will not lead a man. I know something of that, too." Here he frowns darkly, and sits for a long time looking the incarnation of resentment and defiance.

"Bah!" he mutters presently, "what a blot upon the record of a proud family! A father who is a philanthropist and public benefactor; a mother who is '*une dame sans reproche;*' a brother against whom I can bring no charge save that he is my rival; a sister, beautiful and good and accomplished, but that beauty, goodness, culture, are all shipwrecked; how could either live in the same atmosphere with John Burrill, as I have heard him described. Evan Lamotte is a black sheep; I should take it Burrill must be a black dog, or worse, and sheep and dog are owned by the same family. After all, what is race? A fig for pedigree! It's the deed that tells. Here in the next room I have a man who claims to be nobody. Nothing is said or known about his blood; a great deal is said and known about his brain, favourably said, too, and honourably known. He is a detective, and as such, dead to the blue book; it's his business to hunt men down, to pry into secret places, to unmask villainies, and drag to light shameful family secrets; and, for the second time, he has stumbled upon a secret of mine, and treated it most generously.

"To-night I say to him, 'Know me only as Doctor Heath, from nowhere.' Another man would have asked for an explanation, when the opportunity came; but not he. He sits with me, sups with me, sleeps under my roof, and makes no sign that he ever knew me save as I now am. He treats me as a man worthy his confidence, yet asks none of mine. That's what I call splendid behaviour; that's a man worthy to be called a gentleman. I wonder;" here his countenance darkens, and his eyes look gloomy. "I wonder what this honorable officer would say if he knew what I did to-night? If he knew, say I! Does he not know? How can I tell? He is sharp as a lynx; and heaven only knows what mad impulse prompted me to do a mean thing. Bah!" rising and stretching himself; "we all are fools or knaves, or both; when a beautiful woman has dethroned reason and common sense, and sways us body and soul. I wonder what Constance Wardour would say if she knew? A keen-witted detective takes me on trust; will she do the same?"

There is little of the look of a despairing swain on his face, as he concludes his soliloquy, and goes out to see that the outer door is secure, before retiring. A trifle pale, a trifle bored, a trifle cynical, and a trifle sleepy he looks. He also looks, for a man who has just been indulging in a fit of severe self-depreciation, exceedingly confident and full of faith in himself. And why not? Let that man despair who has lost confidence in his own ability to wrest favours from the fingers of Fate or Fortune. Despair is not for the brave.

CHAPTER VII.

A FALLING OUT.

CONSTANCE WARDOUR arose early on Sunday morning. In spite of youth, health, and her splendid self-poise, she had slept but little; and such slumber as had visited her eyelids had been haunted by hideous dreams, in which detectives and burglars mixed their identity in the most remarkable manner; and through all, more vivid than all, shone the face of Sybil Lamotte, always agonized, always appealing, always surrounded by dark shadows, and always seeming menaced, terrified, helpless. Such nights of tormented slumber, and uneasy wakefulness, were new to the mistress of Wardour; and now, while the dew was yet on the grass and flowers, she was promenading her pretty rose garden, where the sun shone full, looking a trifle paler than was usual to her, and somewhat dissatisfied.

Mrs. Aliston was still snugly ensconced in her bed, for she never rose early, and always retired late, her motto being, "Mrs. Aliston first, the world afterward." That lady of portly dimensions had her peculiar theory of life. To eat the best food obtainable, and a great deal of it; to wear the heaviest silks, and the softest cashmeres; and to sleep in the downiest of beds; these were to her the necessities of life. That the food was pro-

vided from the larder of her niece; that the silks and cashmeres were gracious gifts, and that the downy couch cost her nothing, mattered little; her niece needed her, she needed her niece; *ergo*, her niece sought in every way possible to render her happy and comfortable; and she, in return for her comfort and happiness, was a model duenna; never questioning, never criticising, humouring all that young lady's whims, yet retaining that free, hearty out-spokenness that made her seem not in the least a dependent, and which was, as Mrs. Aliston well knew, most pleasing to the heiress.

Altogether, they were a pair of very sensible women. Mrs. Aliston ate when she liked, and slept when she liked; Miss Wardour did what *she* liked, and both were satisfied.

While Miss Wardour was promenading her garden, and Mrs. Aliston was comfortably sleeping, two men were approaching each other on the sandy road that ran from the town past Wardour Place.

The one coming from townward was our detective tramp, looking all that a tramp should be.

The other, approaching from the opposite direction, was a sleek, respectable-looking, middle-aged man, who might have been some small farmer dressed in his Sunday clothes, which fitted him none too well.

Almost opposite the gates of Wardour Place they met and passed each other, the tramp saluting respectfully, the other responding with a stolid stare.

A little further on the tramp turned slowly and looked back. The farmer-looking individual had entered the grounds of Wardour Place, and was hurrying straight on toward the entrance, looking neither to the right or left.

"So!" muttered the tramp, with the air of a man who would have been astonished then, but for the fact that he never allowed anything to astonish him. "So *he* is mixing himself up in this affair! I wonder in what capacity? Can it be that by some means he has been selected to work up this case? Oh! oh! Bless my soul! What a coincidence that would be?"

Evidently he had grasped at a new idea, and one that was something startling. He quickened his pace until, unconsciously it became almost a trot. The mask of studied vacancy dropped from his face, leaving it alert, keen, analytical. His mind had grasped at a problem, and he was studying it with knitted brow and compressed mouth, as he hurried on countryward, not heeding anything save the thought which possessed him.

It was Sunday morning, too early for churchgoers, and too late for cowboys. So he met no one on his hurried march, and when at last he began to moderate his pace, he was a full mile from Wardour Place. As his walk grew slower his face relaxed, and gradually resumed its mask of careless stupidity.

Finally he paused, looked about him, laughed a short half laugh, and crossed the road, vaulted a high-wired fence with the ease of a harlequin, and took his way across a meadow toward the river.

"Tra-la, tra-la-la-la-la," chirped he, softly and contentedly. "*What* a pretty kettle of fish. How I should love to sit down right beside it and see it boil, stir it occasionally; instead, I must go far away, and meantime, who knows, the kettle may boil over. But I hope not, I trust not. I will try and prevent it; and, to do that, I must drop a little shell before I go. I must bind Miss Wardour over to my aid. I must show her that it is wise to trust me. I must have a confidante here and there are only two to choose from—Doctor Heath, 'from nowhere,' and this clear-eyed lady. I choose her; for, with all due regard for my friend, the doctor, and all due faith in the propriety of his motives, I must know *why* he throws that bit of circumstantial evidence in my way, before I show him any part of my hand. Why Doctor Heath is here, is none of my business, strange as his presence and present occupation seem to me. Why he is mixing himself up in the affair of Miss Wardour's diamonds, however, *is* my business, just now. But, first of all, to know how much or little Jerry Belknap knows of this affair, and of these people, and whether he is at his old crookedness once more. Now, here is the river; here the footpath. I must see the mistress of Wardour Place, and at once; so, *en evant*."

And he struck into the river footpath, and strode rapidly along toward Wardour Place, whistling softly as he went. Meantime, Constance Wardour, pacing the walks of her garden, with her brows wrinkled into a frown, was interrupted by her housemaid.

"If you please, miss, there's a man in the front hall, that's wanting to see you, and says I am to tell you it's important that his business is."

Constance made a slight gesture of im-

patience; she had been thinking of Sybil Lamotte, to the exclusion of all other subjects and this message brought her suddenly back to her own affairs.

"Important!" she muttered to herself. "Then it must be—the other one. Nelly," raising her voice, "what is this man like?"

"Like, miss?" inquiringly.

"Yes. How does he look?"

"Oh! Well, it's very ugly he looks to my notion."

"Does he look like a gentleman, Nelly?"

"Oh, murther! no."

"Like a tramp, then?"

"No; his clothes is too new."

"Well, Nelly, I will go and see him," said Constance, beginning to despair of finding out whether this visitor were the tramp of the night previous, or the new actor expected on the scene. "You know I never allow you to turn a tramp away hungry, and if one comes who seems worthy of help, I wish you always to let me know it."

This she said, thinking of the manner in which it was probable the detective tramp would seek access to her presence.

"By the way Nelly," pausing with one foot on the steps of the dining-room terrace. "You may wake Mrs. Aliston and tell her that if I wish her to join me in the little parlour I will send you to her," then *sotto voce*, as she entered the house and went carelessly toward the drawing-room: "If this visitor proves a bore I will turn him over to Aunt Honor; I can't have two days of constant boredom."

Coming forward from the lower entrance, Constance encountered the gaze of the strange man, whom, arriving at the front door, Nelly had not ventured to set down as a tramp, and whose clothes made her doubt the propriety of showing him the drawing-room. Being of Hibernian extraction, and not to be nonplussed, Nelly had adopted a happy medium, and seated the visitor in the largest hall chair, where he now awaited the approach of Constance.

"I think you wished to see me," said Constance, in the uneffected kindly tone usual to her when addressing strangers or inferiors, "I am Miss Wardour."

The stranger arose, making a stiff salute, and saying in a low, guarded tone:

"Yes, Miss Wardour, I have a message for you;" at the same moment he presented her a card, and glanced in a suggestive manner toward Nelly, who was travelling up the stairs in a very leisurely manner, *en route* for Mrs. Aliston's rooms.

Constance glanced at the card, which bore the inscription,

"JERRY BELKNAP,
Private Detective."

"Come this way," she said, throwing open the drawing-room door and preceding him into that apartment.

Jerry Belknap, private detective, followed close behind her, and himself closed the door carefully. Constance crossed the room, drew back the curtains, and pushed open the shutters of the terrace windows, thus letting in a flood of light. Then turning, she seated herself upon a fauteuil, and motioning the detective to a chair opposite, said:

"Now, sir, I am ready to receive your message."

"It's a verbal one," returned the detective, in a voice soft and smooth, not at all in keeping with his disguise, "and from Mr. Lamotte. I am the officer chosen by him to investigate for you, Miss Wardour, and as much time has been lost, I only wait your sanction and acceptance to begin the work."

The soft voice and polished accent were in very marked contrast to his dress and facial appearance. His manner of boorish discomfort had been dropped when the door closed upon outside observation.

Mentally contrasting the ease and suavity of this new comer with the cat-like movements and brusqueness of his predecessor, Constance, who began to realize the ludicrousness of the situation, in fact seemed to have some special private reason for finding it exceedingly absurd, replied that Mr. Lamotte's chosen officer must of course be acceptable to her, and that she only awaited his commands, if she could be of any service to him.

"Then," said Detective Belknap, "I may as well look over the premises, unless," turning upon her a searching look, "there are particulars concerning the robbery which Mr. Lamotte was not in possession of."

Constance lowered her eyes, in seeming effort to remember if Mr. Lamotte knew absolutely all; she thought of the chloroform, but the bottle had not yet been returned to her. What should she do? Before telling this part of the story she must have the bottle. Suddenly her woman's wit came to her aid. Looking up with sweetest candour into the detective's face, she said:

"I am the only one who possesses any information that was not known to Mr. Lamotte. It is a mere trifle, but as it will take some time in the telling, I will, if you please, order breakfast. You can scarcely have breakfasted at this hour. I will show you the library now. Will you look over that and the other rooms, and kindly excuse me for a short time? Then join me at breakfast, and I will give you my version of the story."

She arose as if considering the matter decided beyond question, and moved toward the door, and with a bow and a murmur of assent, Mr. Jerry Belknap fell into his assumed shamble, and followed her to the library. Leaving him there, Constance went out to order breakfast served in half an hour, and to send Nelly with the key to her dressing-room.

"Nelly must be taken into my confidence," mused she, as she went in search of that damsel. "I can trust Nelly in spite of her Irishries, and if Doctor Heath does not appear soon she must help me out in some way."

Nelly was not at her post, having been dispatched kitchenward by Mrs. Aliston, and Constance went up to her own rooms, thinking, as she went, how best to defer a further interview with Mr. Belknap.

"I must take him the key myself," she muttered, as she moved about the dressing-room, and then a sudden thought came, and she moved quickly to an open wardrobe, pulled down the dress she had worn on the previous afternoon, and searched hurriedly in the pockets.

All at once a look of dismay overspread her features; again and again she shook out the silken folds, again thrust her hands in the dainty pockets, and fluttered her fingers among the intricacies of the trimming. The thing she searched for was gone. Sybil Lamotte's strange letter, the letter that was a trust not to be violated, was not to be found.

Thoroughly distressed now, Constance renewed her search—about the room—everywhere—in the most impossible places; but no letter.

Down-stairs she went; and hopeless as was the chance of finding it there, hunted in the drawing-room and on the terrace.

She distinctly remembered placing it in her pocket, after receiving it back from the hands of Doctor Heath; of bestowing it very carefully, too.

Who had been in the drawing-room since Doctor Heath? Mrs. Aliston; the two detectives; herself. Who had seen her put the letter in her pocket? Only Doctor Heath. Could it have dropped from her pocket? That seemed impossible. Could he have removed it? That seemed impossible, too, and very absurd. But what could she think, else? Then, she remembered what he had said to the detective the night before, and all the mystery surrounding his past. Hitherto, she had scoffed at the prying ones, and advocated his perfect right to his own past and future, too. Now, she felt her ignorance of aught concerning the life of Doctor Clifford Heath to be a deep personal injury. Hitherto, she had reasoned that his past was something very simple, a commonplace of study, perhaps, and self-building; for she, being an admirer of self-made men, had chosen to believe him one of them. Now, she bounded straight to the conclusion that Doctor Heath had a past—to conceal; and then she found herself growing very angry, with him first, and herself afterward.

Why had he not presented his passports before seeking her favour? How had he dared to make himself so much at home in her drawing-room, with his impertinent *insouciance* and his sultan airs? How had he gone about, indifferent, independent, ignoring when he pleased, courting no one's favour, and yet, be—nobody knew who!

And what a fool she had been, trusting him with her personal secrets; putting her private letters into his hands. How he must be laughing at her in his sleeve! Exasperating thought. Worse than all else, to be laughed at. What worse calamity can befall poor, arrogant human nature?

Constance was now thoroughly angry, and, "by the same token," thoroughly unreasonable. It is highly objectionable in a heroine; but Constance, as we have said before, is a very human heroine. And, dear reader, however sensible you be, if you have ever been in just the state of mind in which Constance Wardour found herself that morning, and most of us have, I promise you, you were not one whit more reasonable, not one whit less capable of being aggressive, unreasonable, and generally disagreeable.

And now, the perverse imp who goes about concocting horrible practical jokes, and stirring up *contretemps*, seemed to take possession of the field; for, just at the moment when he should have been at least five miles away, Doctor Heath, unannounced, appeared at the

drawing-room door,—smiling, too, looking provokingly sure of a welcome, and handsomer than usual.

Miss Wardour's self-possession was as instant as her indignation.

"Good morning, Doctor Heath," frigidly. "I am sorry you found it necessary to admit yourself in this manner. I suppose my servants *are* neglectful."

"Not at all," replied he, discovering that she was out of humour, but not divining the cause. "Your housemaid admitted me, and thinking you in your own room, was about to usher me in here, and go to announce me, when I saved her the trouble, telling her that my time was limited, and admitting myself; had I known you were here, I should not have intruded without permission;" then perceiving that her face retained its frigidity, his voice took on a shade of haughtiness as he laid a packet upon the table, saying: "I have brought back your 'proofs;' Mr. Bathurst wished me to say, if I chanced to see you first, that is," hesitating.

"I have not seen Mr. Bathurst."

"No!" Doctor Heath seemed to be somewhat affected by the chill of the atmosphere. "Then I am to say that he has something for your private ear, and that when he comes he begs that you will contrive in some way to see him, whether your other officer is here or no."

A grave bow from Lapland. Then:

"Officer Belknap is here, and in the library. I presume," consulting her watch, "he is waiting for me at this moment."

Doctor Heath had been standing a few feet from her, hat in hand; now, in spite of this implied dismissal, he coolly deposited his hat upon the table beside Miss Wardour's package, and advanced nearer to that young lady, speaking calmy, gently even, but without the slightest touch of entreaty, penitence, or humility of any sort in his manner or voice.

"Miss Wardour, pardon me for alluding to it, but I would be blind indeed not to see that something has annoyed you exceedingly. Indeed, I could almost fancy that, in some way, I have become the cause of your displeasure; if this is so, tell me how I have been so unfortunate as to offend?"

Now this was a very pacific and proper speech, and uttered in the right spirit. But had its effect been salutary, then Doctor Heath would stand alone, the first, last, and only man who ever yet attempted to argue with, reason with, or pacify an angry woman without blundering egregiously in the beginning, and coming out worsted at the end. There are a *few* things in this world that mortal man can't compass, and to attempt to pour oil on the waves of a woman's wrath when they are just at the boiling-point, and ready to overflow their confines, is like sitting down on a bunch of fire-crackers to prevent their going off. Let the water boil over, and there will still be enough left to brew you a cup of tea. Let the crackers explode, and you may sit down on them with impunity.

Dear brethren, the moral is homely.

How had he offended? That he should ask the question, was the acme of his offence. As if she could tell how he had offended. Was there ever so impertinent a question and questioner? "How had he been so *unfortunate* as to offend?" Any other man would have said "unhappy," whether he meant it or not, but this man, oh! he would not even *look* a culprit.

She raised her haughty head a trifle higher, as high as it could be; she drew back as many steps as he had advanced; the room had become a refrigerator.

"Doctor Heath flatters himself; in what manner *could* he offend me?"

Still he retains his composure, not guessing at the truth.

"I have never presumed, Miss Wardour, therefore cannot have flattered myself. I *may* have offended by coming one moment too late with this packet. Miss Wardour is accustomed to unqualified obedience. If I fail in that it is not from lack of inclination, but—because I am just learning submission." He uttered the last words in a lower, softer tone, and fell back as he uttered them, laying his hand upon his hat.

Anger, self-shame, and a strange thrilling emotion, she could not or would not recognise or define, urged her out of herself, beyond herself, and beyond the bounds of propriety, or courtesy. Sweeping toward him with one swift movement, she extended one hand with downward turned palm, in a quick, meaning gesture, and said—

"Doctor Heath, I have lost Sybil Lamotte's letter."

"Lost it! How?"

"That I should be glad to know; since I showed it to you last night and replaced it in my pocket, I have not seen it; and, Doctor Heath, as I do not wish, without your knowledge, to be in possession of any secret of

yours, I may as well tell you now that I overheard your warning to the detective last night."

"My warning!" he repeated, parrot-like.

"Your reminder that you must be to him, *Doctor Heath from nowhere!*"

Doctor Heath from nowhere, gazed at her for a moment as if petrified, his mind seeming reluctant or unable to grasp at once her full meaning; then he came close to her, straight and tall, and paler than her own pale robe; the blood of all the Howards flashing from his eye, and speaking in his bearing. Thus, for a moment, they faced each other, pale, passionate, mute; then a voice, soft and suave, broke the spell.

"I trust you will pardon me."

They turned swiftly; neither had faced the door; both had been too preoccupied to observe or hear. How long he had been a listener he alone could tell; but there stood Mr. Jerry Belknap, private detective, one hand resting on the handle of the closed door, and the other holding an open note-book.

Doctor Heath vouchsafed him one dark glance, then bending above the uplifted hand of Constance Wardour, he looked straight down into her eyes, and said in a low, tense voice—

"Miss Wardour, your words have been not an accusation, but an insult; as such, I can only accept them—in silence; good morning."

Then he turned, waved the private detective haughtily from before the door, and strode out, his heels ringing firm upon the hall marble as he went.

"I fear I intruded," said Mr. Belknap, innocently. "I have just finished making some notes in the library, and am ready to proceed to the upper floor."

"Breakfast." It was Nelly who appeared with this announcement, which was welcome, at least to Mr. Belknap; and pale, silent, subdued, Constance motioned him to precede her to the dining-room.

"I'm sure to be in a situation," mused the girl with a rueful grimace. "If it's only a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with a detective."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE DETECTIVE TOO MANY.

"AUNT HONOR," said Miss Wardour, sweeping unceremoniously into her aunt's dressing-room, "you really must come to my relief."

Mrs. Aliston, seated in a big dressing chair, with a tempting breakfast tray drawn close beside her, looked up serene and comfortable, and said, after setting down her porcelain chocolate cup with great care—

"Yes!" with the rising inflection.

"I'm exhausted, bothered, bored," continued the young lady, flinging herself down upon the nearest ottoman. "I wish my old diamonds had never had an existence. I wish Grandmama Wardour had had better sense."

"Have a cup of chocolate," suggested Mrs. Aliston.

"I won't," snapped Constance, belligerently. "I have breakfasted, if you please; auntie," lowering her voice to a tone of mock mystery; "we have got another detective in the house."

"So Nelly tells me," reaching out for another roll.

"And, he has breakfasted with me."

Mrs. Aliston laid down the roll, turned for a moment to gaze at her niece; and, reading in that fair upturned face, the fact that its owner was in a state of mutiny against the proprieties and all things else that might come in opposition to her will, she took up her roll and buttered it carefully as she said:

"Well! that's quite like you. What sort of a man is he?"

"Splendid," with a shrug of the shoulders, "smooth as oil, polished as ivory; a Chesterfield in ill-fitting clothes."

"And, a detective?"

"Well, why not? Somehow he has picked up all the arts and graces of a gentleman."

"Really! Not much like the other one, then."

"Not in the least. The other is eccentric, explosive, amusing. This one is like a lawyer; very non-committal, not at all inclined to tell all he knows."

"Oh! have you told him about the chloroform?"

"Yes; he has the bottle."

"Well, what did *he* say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Not a word."

"Goodness gracious! and you breakfasted with him?"

"Yes; and he has spent half an hour or more in the drawing-room. I have told him all I had to tell, and he is now prowling about my dressing-room."

"But what does he think about this affair?"

"I don't know;" indifferently.

"Why, it didn't take you all breakfast time to tell *your* story?"

"Oh, no; I told my story and Mr. Belknap listened very attentively; made some entries in his note-book, remarked that he would have a report ready for me in the course of the day, and then turned his back upon the subject."

"Mercy!"

"He discussed the new opera, asked me if I had seen Neilson in *Twelfth Night*, gave a brilliant description of a young French drama by a young French author, gave me his opinion of Dickens, and looked his opinion of myself."

"What a remarkable person."

"Exceedingly so. His remarks have quite exhausted me."

"Now, Con.;" reproachfully.

"Now, auntie, don't plead, my heart is adamant. If you don't go and interview that man for the remainder of his stay I shall order William to throw him out of my dressing-room window; not that I have a rooted antipathy for him; he is certainly a clever man, and no doubt a good officer. But I am worn out, unfit for duty, and—I have another matter to attend to."

"Oh!" ejaculates Mrs. Aliston arising, "then, my child, I am ready, or almost ready, to go and inspect your new detective."

Accordingly Mrs. Aliston goes to her mirror, touches up her dressing-cap, gives a pat here, a shake there, and then ruffling her plumage like some huge old bird, follows her niece.

Across the hall they find the detective inspecting the little safe, and hurriedly introducing Mrs. Aliston, and making her own excuses, Constance hastens away and down stairs.

Down the stairs and out of the house, first because she felt oppressed and needed the soothing effects of fresh air and exercise, and, second, because she expected the tramp detective to be somewhere in the vicinity, and, for some reason, she wanted to see him. In spite of the fact that she had just declared herself bored, and desperate, and anxious to be alone; in spite of the fact that she had fled from detective number two, she wanted to see number one for a woman's reason. Having quarrelled desperately with Clifford Heath, she was immediately possessed by an insane desire to hear some one speak of him, and speak well of him. This man had treated Doctor Heath from the first with the utmost respect. He was undoubtedly pleased at their chance meeting; after all might not this secret which lay between the two be a perfectly honourable one.

In fact, Miss Wardour wanted to see Detective Bathurst, not as Detective Bathurst, but as the man who knew Doctor Clifford Heath better than she herself knew him. Of her diamonds, she never thought at all.

She felt depressed, dissatisfied, yet not quite prepared to blame herself in any way. She was possessed by more uncomfortable feelings than she could have analyzed or described, yet was too consistent a woman to be so soon ready to admit, even to herself, that she had wronged Dr. Heath. Indeed, she was more angry than ever with that unfortunate man. Had he not capped the climax of his iniquities by flying off at a tangent, and leaving her in a most uncomfortable position?

The grounds about Wardour Place were large, well shaded, and laid out with a network of walks. With a view to the avoiding of those paths overlooked by the windows of her dressing-room, or other rooms where her aunt and the detective were likely to be, Constance kept to the north and east walks, thus coming near the river, which ran north and south, and toward which the eastern, or near, portion of the grounds sloped down.

Walking thus, and gazing riverward, Constance saw a form approaching, which she soon recognised as that of the detective tramp.

Glancing quickly about to see if any of the servants were in the grounds, and assuring herself that the way was clear, she went forward to where he could see her, before approaching too near.

Gazing fixedly at him, a slight movement of his hand told her that he had seen, and was alert; and then she made a gesture northward, and, turning that way herself, disappeared from his sight among the shrubbery.

On the north, the grounds were bounded by the orchard wall, over which drooped the branches of huge old apple trees, and down close to the eastern boundary of this same orchard, a small iron gate opened into it. Toward this gate Constance walked, avoiding any appearance of unseemly haste, and toward the eastern wall, hard by, went the tramp detective, looking innocent of any thought or purpose, save to intercept the lady, and beg for a dinner, a dollar, or a dime.

Reaching the gate, Constance passed through it into the orchard, and, almost, at

the same moment, the tramp bounded over the wall, and stood bowing beside her.

"Come into the grounds," said Constance, waiving all ceremony. "If we are seen talking there, it will look less suspicious. My servants are quite accustomed to see me interviewing tramps."

She led the way back into the grounds, closed the wicket, and walked along the orchard wall to a rustic bench close under the bending boughs of a great tree. Here she seated herself, and the tramp, leaning against a tree a few paces from her, turned upon her a look of proper supplication, and said:

"Now I think we are ready for observers."

"Quite. None of my servants saw you last night, and they are not likely to come here in any case. We shall hardly be disturbed."

"You think so? May I ask how long you have been absent from the house?"

"About fifteen minutes, I should think."

"Well, in fifteen minutes more Mr. Belknap will be out looking at the grounds, and for you."

Constance uttered a low exclamation of surprise.

"Ah!" said she, "you know that already. Pray tell me how? You are more puzzling than a Chinese juggler."

"No jugglery about this, however," he replied, looking somewhat amused. "I met Mr. Belknap, face to face at your very gate; I have seen him wear that farmer disguise before, hence I recognised him."

"And he?"

"Did *not* recognise me."

"Yet you know each other?"

"Slightly, yes;" with a droll look in his eyes, of which Constance took note.

"Now tell me, Mr. Bathurst, is Mr. Belknap a good detective?"

"Mr. Belknap is a smart man, Miss Wardour; he understands his business thoroughly."

"He equivocates," thought Constance; aloud she said—

"And I need not fear to trust my business in his hands?"

"You need not fear," he replied, with odd emphasis. "And now," he continued, "time presses; you received your package, Miss Wardour?"

Constance felt uneasy, this man seemed to find out everything; did he know of what she had accused Doctor Heath?

"I received it an hour ago," she replied.

"Miss Wardour," asked he, fixing his eyes upon her face, "have you any suspicion as to who these robbers were?"

For a moment Constance seemed half paralyzed with fright; then she answered firmly—

"No, sir; not the shadow of a suspicion; but—you have."

"If I have, it is not more than a shadow—at present. Now, may I ask you some questions, not just to the point but which, for my own reasons, I wish answered?"

She nodded assent.

"Can you tell me how many medical men you have in W——?"

Constance reflected; finally she said—

"I think there are seven, in all."

"Ah! all in practice?"

"Not all; two are retired, one is an invalid, doing but little."

"Thank you; and how many of them have assistants or students?"

"Only two, to my knowledge, Doctor Benoit and—Doctor Heath."

"And who are these young men—I suppose they *are* young men? Can you give me any information concerning them?"

"The young man with Doctor Benoit is a stranger to me; he comes, I believe, from one of the neighbouring towns; the one with Doctor Heath," here, in spite of herself, Constance coloured slightly, "is the son of one of our wealthiest citizens. He had, I believe, been reading a little in the city during the winter before Doctor Heath established himself here, since when he has remained in W——, and read in Doctor Heath's office, when it has suited him to do so; he is like many young men of great expectations."

"And his name?"

"His name," hesitating a little, "is Francis Lamotte."

"Thank you; and now, Miss Wardour, I want to ask at least three favours of you, in return for which you may command me to any extent."

"Ask them," replied Constance, feeling inwardly that she was outgrowing surprise.

"First, will you promise me—I know that you keep your promises—not to repeat one word of this conversation to Doctor Heath."

"Doctor Heath is not my father confessor," she said coldly; and then remembering the sort of man she was addressing, she added as best she could, "although from what you saw last night, you might almost have fancied

him such. I promise in any case to keep secret this interview."

"Will you promise, above all, to keep it from Mr. Belknap; to keep *everything* concerning me from his knowledge?"

Constance laughed.

"So far as I can," she replied. "Mr. Belknap is a detective; let him find out things as you seem to do."

"I don't find out everything, more's the pity," he replied; then, hesitating slightly over the question, "May I rely on your aunt?"

"I promise for my aunt," replied Constance, laughing again; "she is very loyal."

"Thank you. Now there is one thing more. I very much wish, for reasons which no doubt you will know in good time, to see or hear the report of Mr. Jerry Belknap, private detective. This I know, is asking much, but you will have no cause to regret it if you enable me to obtain this knowledge."

Constance looked perplexed, and hesitated in her answer.

"You distrust Mr. Belknap," she said finally. "I thought—"

He throws up his hand somewhat impatiently.

"You jump at conclusions," he interrupted; "a detective's motives must be taken for granted. It is not distrust that causes me to ask this favour; I could not tell you my reason without unravelling a long web, and it is not time to begin the process; I am still in the realm of conjecture. So you won't help me to the result of Mr. Belknap's investigation, Miss Wardour? I am sorry; it would save time for me, for I fully intend to find it out in some way."

Constance smiled in spite of herself; she admired this man's cool way of mastering the situation; she felt that it would be policy to let him have his way, since he would take it whether she would or no. But the imp of caprice had not quite deserted her, and now he goaded her on to her own downfall. Looking up suddenly, she asked:

"Mr. Bathurst, why did you ask me if I suspected who stole my diamonds?"

"I didn't," smiling oddly.

Constance stared.

"I asked if you guessed who the robbers were."

"But—," began she; but the detective drawing a step nearer, and speaking in a guarded tone, interrupts her.

"I am satisfied that you were *robbed* on Saturday night, Miss Wardour; I am sure that you have no clue to the burglars, no suspicion as to their identity; but, I am not so sure that you do not know *precisely where to look for the Wardour diamonds at this moment?*"

Constance flushed, and then turned pale. She had found her match; she was cornered, mastered, but she must give one last scratch.

"Having divined so much," she said bitterly. "I suppose you intend to find them too?"

He drew himself up haughtily. "I am a detective, madam, not a spy; so long as your diamonds give *you* no uneasiness they have no interest for me. When you need my services they are yours. I do not investigate mysteries from mere curiosity."

Constance felt a twinge of self-reproach. "I am behaving like a fool," she thought, in severe condemnation. "I am losing my own identity; this man is a friend to rely on, an enemy to fear. He will not bow to my whims and caprices. What has come over me? Let me try and redeem myself."

She had been musing with downcast eyes; now she looked up, straight into her companion's face. It had undergone a sudden change; the eyes, a moment since so full of fire and subtlety, were dull and expressionless. The face was vague to apathy, the mouth looked the incarnation of meekness or imbecility; even his hands had taken on a helpless feebleness in the clutch in which he held his worn-out hat. Before she could withdraw her gaze or open her lips in speech, he said in a low guarded tone:

"Some one is approaching. Look behind me, Miss Wardour, and carefully, not to excite suspicion."

She turned her gaze cautiously in the direction indicated, and saw coming slowly toward them, Mr. Belknap and Mrs. Aliston.

"It is Mr. Belknap," she said, nodding easily at the new comers as she spoke, "and my aunt. Have no fears, sir tramp, everything shall be as you wish. I will engage you, I think."

Constance was herself again.

"Aunt Honor," she said, as the two came within hearing distance, "you find me at my old tricks."

"Old tricks indeed!" replied her aunt, with more subtlety of meaning than she often employed.

Constance arose and swept past the sup-

posed tramp, without bestowing a glance upon him.

"What would you do, aunt?" she said, with an hair of honest anxiety that would have done credit to an actress, "here is this man again. You know I promised to try and help him when he was here before. Simon needs an assistant, he tells me; would you try him as under gardener?"

Thoroughly drilled in the art of aiding and abetting her niece, Mrs. Aliston proved equal to the emergency.

"It couldn't do any harm," she said surveying the gentleman tramp somewhat superciliously. "He looks quite respectable, for that sort of a person."

Constance stifled an inclination to laugh as she said, briskly:

"Then we will try him, and I'll just take him to the kitchen, and tell cook what to do with him until Simon comes."

"Now just let me do that, Con.," remonstrated Mr. Aliston. "Mr. Belknap wishes to talk with you about the servants; remain here, and I will attend to this person."

"Very well," responded Constance, indifferently, at the same time realising the expediency of allowing the detective an instant opportunity for dropping a word of warning in the ear of her relative. "Tell the cook to give him something to eat, and now Mr. Belknap, you and I may walk on."

"Just follow me, my man," called Mrs. Aliston, in a tone of loftiest patronage, and the newly appointed under gardener, beaming with gratitude, passed by Miss Wardour and Mr. Belknap, and followed the portly figure kitchenward with eager alacrity.

Meantime, Constance, eager to engross Mr. Belknap's attention, turned toward him a smiling face, and said:

"Now, Mr. Belknap, I am at your disposal or a short time; fate seems against my obtaining the rest I came out here to seek, but *your* business is in my interest, and I am not ungrateful; you wished to say something about my servants."

"I wish to question your servants separately, Miss Wardour."

Constance opened her eyes in quick surprise, then she answered quietly:

"To question my servants! Oh, certainly, Mr. Belknap; when, and where?"

"This evening would suit me; I am going to look about the surrounding country during the day."

"This evening then, after dinner; will that suit you?"

"Admirably, say at half-past eight;" and having completed his arrangements in this business-like manner, Mr. Belknap asked permission to pass through the orchard, received it, and, bowing gravely, went through the wicket, and walked swiftly between the rows of apple trees straight northward.

At six o'clock that evening, Miss Wardour sent for the gardener.

"Simon," she said sweetly to the cross looking old man, "I engaged a new man to-day, perhaps you have seen him. I don't expect he can be very useful to you just at first, and I want you to give him very light tasks, and treat him kindly; he is a very unfortunate man. If we find that we can't make him useful after a few days' trial, we will pay him a month's wages and let him go. That will help him a little."

Then she sent for the new man.

"I thought you might wish to hear the latest report from Mr. Belknap," she said graciously. "If I am to be your ally, I intend to keep nothing back; but I can't help fearing that he may suspect your identity."

"You need not," he replied with confident ease. "He has every reason for supposing me in California at this moment; besides, he does not know me well enough to be able to recognise me under a good disguise; our acquaintance," he added dryly, "has been somewhat one sided, with the advantage so far on my side. When I told you that I knew Mr. Belknap well, I did not intend to imply that he knew me equally well."

"Then I will trouble myself no more about the matter," said she lightly. "Mr. Belknap wishes to examine the servants, that is what I wished to tell you."

"Very proper in Mr. Belknap."

"Oh, is it? I thought it very absurd. My servants are honesty itself."

"So much the better; Mr. Belknap knows how to go to work, Miss Wardour, pray feel no prejudice."

"Oh, not at all," ironically. "Now about the report. Be within easy call to-morrow morning, please; I think we will have it then."

"Thanks."

"I suppose it will be best to have you present, that is, within hearing. I will arrange that the interview will take place in the dining-room, and can easily get you into the butler's room adjoining, where William sleeps; this

room was arranged with a view to the overlooking of the dining-room and plate-closet, as you discovered for yourself; from there you can both hear and see."

"So much the better." Then admiringly, he added, "Miss Wardour you are a splendid ally; you have thought of everything,"

She laughed; then answered with artful frankness: "I am trying to get back into my normal condition. I have been out of balance somehow, ever since this business commenced; have been as testy as an old woman of eighty. It is time I began to redeem myself. But I must not detain you. I see you begin to look uneasy. Until to-morrow, I commend you to the tender mercies of Simon and the cook."

"I wonder how the man looks, devoid of all disguise," mused she, after he had withdrawn. "I don't believe he is tow-haired and freckled by nature. I wonder what has become of poor Sybil's letter, and if I had better ask his aid in finding it? But he is going away so soon. Now that I reflect, soberly, what motive could Doctor Heath possibly have for taking that letter? I think I must have been mad, or in hysteria. The man may be an impostor, a man of mystery, and all that; but why must I accuse him of taking a letter that could be of no possible use to him. I had worked myself into a rage. Well, it's done; I can't recall it. Doctor Heath will think me a vixen, and why not? What is Doctor Heath's opinion to me?"

What, indeed!

CHAPTER IX.

DEDUCTIONS OF DETECTIVE NUMBER TWO.

THE fates seemed propitious on Monday morning. The day dawned fair and balmy, and Constance arose, feeling refreshed and like her own serene self once more.

The events of the two previous days no longer seemed to her imagination a chaotic disturbing mass of tribulations; they had arranged themselves in their proper order, been reviewed sensibly, and assigned their rightful places, as things to be overcome, or overlooked, as the case might be.

Mrs. Aliston, too, at once discreet and talkative, was in fine spirits, and the two, having ascertained the precise time when Private Detective Belknap might be expected to make his report, had breakfasted comfortably, stowed away Mr. Bathurst, according to previous arrangement, and were now calmly awaiting the coming man.

They had not long to wait. Mr. Belknap, ushered in by Nelly, found the ladies seated near the breakfast tray, as if just about completing a repast, which had in reality been finished some time before.

"Good-morning, ladies," said he, laying down his hat, and at once drawing a chair to the table, with the air of a man whose time is money. "Having completed my investigations here,—that is, in this immediate neighbourhood,—I am prepared with my written report, which I submit to you, Miss Wardour. Will you please read it, and then give me further instructions?" and he proffered her a neatly folded paper, of goodly proportions.

Constance glanced at it dubiously, but did not take it from his hand.

"Please read it, Mr. Belknap," she said, appealingly. "I am sure I shall comprehend it better, and my aunt shares my anxiety to hear and understand its contents."

"As you please," assented he, opening the manuscript. "I have made it as brief as possible; of course, it was necessary to be statistical."

The report began with the usual form, day and date, circumstances under which his services were retained, &c., a statement of the case as it was made to him. Then came the following:—

"Arrived in W—— early on Sunday morning, walking from the first station northward. Found Wardour Place easily from Mr. Lamotte's description. Gained admittance, and was at once permitted to inspect the room where the robbers found an entrance; found that it had been previously examined, and could not feel quite sure that some clue had not been effaced or something disturbed that might have evolved a clue. Miss Wardour assures me that nothing of value was taken from this room, and I am inclined to think that the robbers had hoped to find themselves in the dining-room, and gain access to the plate-closet.

"Finding themselves instead in the library, a room where, there being no man of the house, it could hardly be supposed valuables were kept, or money or papers of worth locked away, they, after a vigorous search, opened the door of the hall; here they found themselves at once at the foot of the stairs and, naturally, one ascends to explore. The first

door that he tries is the door of Miss Wardour's dressing-room; and, having examined that door, I am compelled to think that Miss Wardour, for once, forgot to lock it. Had it been locked the explorer would naturally have passed on, trying the other doors, and some of these other doors were certainly not locked.

"The burglary was effected with the utmost quiet, and there are no indications that any thing was disturbed on the second floor, save in Miss Wardour's rooms, therefore (I cite this presumptive evidence), Miss Wardour's door was *not* locked as she supposed it to be; finding this to be the case the man signalled to his confederate to come up, and then, having a dark lantern, they entered, and surveyed the room. The rest is evident; one of them, skilled in his profession, and in the exigencies that must arise in the practice of it, administered to Miss Wardour the chloroform. Now the operation must have been a delicate one, and the length of time necessary to open the safe and get possession of its contents covered some minutes; having heard Miss Wardour's statement in regard to the effect a powerful dose of chloroform has on her physical system, I incline to the opinion that the drug was administered to her in minute doses, not once, but two or three times at least; this accounts for the bottle and the linen being left in the sleeping-room. Probably, just at the moment when they had stowed away the last of their booty, some slight sound alarmed them and they made a hurried escape, forgetting the bottle entirely.

"The robbers left behind them no clues beyond the established fact that they were professional burglars. This is proved by the manner in which they did their work, and by the tools they must have carried.

"I see plainly here the work of city-bred burglars, and the remainder of the work of finding them is to be done in the city, where they will eventually try to dispose of some of the jewels, no doubt.

"In order to satisfy myself that there has been no accomplice here, who may have been acquainted with the premises, I have searched most thoroughly. I have examined the servants closely, and I find nothing to indicate that there has been any one concerned in this affair who is an inhabitant or habitual visitor in the town.

"In a field to the northward, I have found what may be, I think is, a trace of the robbers. Two or more men have leaped a ditch, running across the field from east to west; and the footmarks in the first instance are coming southward, or toward Wardour. These footmarks are within a few rods of the road, as if the parties had suddenly abandoned that highway, fearing observation from travellers. My supposition is, that they approached Wardour Place, keeping to the field, after having leaped the ditch, until the northern boundary of the orchard was reached; here they must have kept close under the wall, until they came to the roadside fence, which they climbed. The fence bears freshly scraped marks, as if made by boot heels in climbing over, and some tall weeds, growing by the roadside, give evidence of having been hastily and heavily trampled. The thieves probably returned after the robbery, in the same way; for, one crossing of the fence would not have left so many marks visible, either on the boards or among the weeds; and in the darkness they fell a little eastward of their first course; for I find, at the ditch again, but nearer to the river, the same footprints where the ditch has been leaped, this time the footsteps going northward.

"It is probable that the thieves tramped northward under cover of the darkness, until they struck the railroad at some previously selected point, and from thence took the first train cityward."

The reading came thus abruptly to an end, and the reader looked up to note the effect upon his hearers. They both sat in most attentive attitudes, and each face wore an expression of puzzled astonishment. Not being able to reach their "inner consciousness," and read the mental comparisons there being drawn between this report and the very dissimilar summing up of the tramp detective, Mr. Belknap drew his inferences, as do we all, poor mortals that we are, seeing only the outside of the cup and platter. He saw the surprise, the puzzled look, that might denote a partial inability to grasp his thoughts and theories at once, and a feeling of satisfaction took possession of the breast of the astute detective.

Pausing for a comment, and receiving none, he said, with dignified gravity,

"I trust that I have made my report sufficiently plain to you, ladies, and that you find no flaw in it."

Constance, who, with her keen sense of the ridiculous, had been fancying the effect this report would have upon the detective in ambush, and struggling hard with her own risi-

bilities, mastered herself finally, and, preserving her gravity of expression, replied with a wicked undercurrent of meaning:

"It is quite plain to me, sir; I am a poor critic of such matters, but I should think it a masterpiece of directness and comprehensiveness."

"And you see nothing in the theory to object to? You think that, working from these findings, there will be a hope of success?" he queried.

Constance hesitated once more to consider her answer and collect herself generally.

"Why, you know, Mr. Belknap," she said at last, and with charming ingenuousness, "this is not a matter for my judgment; I rely upon you entirely; pray do not hesitate, but continue your investigations in whatever direction your judgment leads you. I wish Mr. Lamotte was here to confer with you; but, if he were here," and her face became sad as she thought of his home-coming; "he would hardly be in spirits for such a consultation. Mr. Lamotte has bad news awaiting him. We must venture this matter without his aid for the present."

The detective's face showed grave concern.

"Bad news for Mr. Lamotte," he murmurs; I deeply deplore that. He seems such a genial, kindly gentleman, so much above the average business man. It is not too serious, I hope."

"It is something you would have heard from the first gossip, if you had mingled with the town people at all," replied Constance, sadly. "I may as well tell you what everyone knows. Mr. Lamotte's only daughter has eloped during his absence, with a very worthless man."

"His only daughter!" repeated the detective in a hushed sympathetic voice; "what a blow! what a bitter blow to a father's heart. Ah, madam," turning to Mrs. Aliston, "these things are common, especially so to men in my profession, but we can never adjust ourselves to them for all that; each one comes to some one with the shock of a never before experienced horror. Death is common, the commonest thing of all, but it is the 'king of terrors' still."

His voice, low, splendidly modulated, sadly cadenced, seemed thrilling with sympathy, and he sighed as he lowered his eyes to the floor, and relapsed into meditation, seemingly forgetful of the business in hand.

Suddenly he started, seeming to recover himself with an effort.

"Pardon my abstraction," he said, a shade of pensiveness still lingering in his voice. "In contemplating another's sorrow, I am forgetting your business. I can only hope that this matter is not as bad as it might be, as such things sometimes are."

"It's as bad as it can be," responded Constance, gloomily. "It won't bear discussion; I mentioned it to you, Mr. Belknap, in order to show you how entirely absorbed Mr. Lamotte will of necessity be in his own affairs when he reaches home, and that we will be obliged to move in this matter without him."

"Perhaps there is some one else you may desire to consult, in Mr. Lamotte's absence?" hazarded the private detective.

"No," replied Constance; my lawyer is out of town, and there is no one else upon whom I can rely. You must act alone, Mr. Belknap."

"Authorised by you, I shall not hesitate to do so," he replied, bowing courteously. "The case looks very clear to me. It will be a matter of time, of course; these old birds are sly; but eventually they will try to market their wares, and then we shall have them. You can give me an accurate description of all the stolen jewels, Miss Wardour?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Then the sooner that is done, the better."

At this moment a soft rap sounded on the door. Constance crossed the room and admitted Nelly, who said in a low tone:

"Mr. Francis Lamotte wishes to see you, Miss. I told him you were particular engaged, just as you told me; but he said to tell you he had just come from his search, and would only detain you for a moment."

Constance paled slightly, and after a moment's thought, said, "Wait a moment, Nelly." Then she went back and addressed the detective and her aunt.

"It is Francis Lamotte," she said, adding, by way of explanation, to the detective, "the eldest son of Mr. Lamotte, and brother of the young lady who has brought trouble to herself and family. He, Francis, went on Saturday, on a self-imposed search through the surrounding country, in the hopes of finding some trace of these robbers. If he is but now returned he cannot yet have heard of his sister's flight. We cannot let him go away in ignorance, and yet," turning a look of swift appeal upon her aunt, "Aunt Honor, will *you* lay aside old prejudices and tell him of this sad misfortune?"

Mrs. Aliston looked doubtful for a moment,

then a look of satisfied commiseration came into her face as she thought:

"She can't be very much infatuated with him or she would herself undertake this delicate task, and I can afford to pity the poor fellow, since she does not pity him overmuch," hence the strange mingling of pleasure and pity in her face as she said aloud:

"Certainly I will break the news to him, my dear, and as gently as is in my power."

Constance was turning to give her answer to Nelly when the voice of the detective interposed.

"Pardon me," he said, "you tell me this young man has been scouring the country in search of information. Would it not be well to hear what report he brings—to allow me to see him here in your presence, and then let Mrs. Aliston tell him her story? Ill news, you know, comes soon enough, at latest."

"Your suggestion is good," replied Constance, whose face continued to look anxious and troubled. "We will receive him here, and after hearing his story, you and I can withdraw."

In the hurry and embarrassment of the moment, and the situation, Constance had entirely forgotten the proximity of the concealed detective, as also had Mrs. Aliston; and that invisible gentleman began to scent the prospect of a long imprisonment.

Obedient to a nod from Constance, Nelly vanished, and soon re-appeared, ushering in Francis Lamotte, looking somewhat jaded and travel-worn, but quite confident and smiling.

In a few words, Constance made him acquainted with the detective, and gave him the outline of the doings at Wardour, including Mr. Belknap's discoveries since he was last there; and the subdued kindness of her manner, caused him to wonder not a little and rejoice greatly, within himself.

"And so you have been bringing things down to a fine point," said Francis, after the greetings were over, and he had listened to Constance's explanation of the present state of affairs.

"It appears, then, that I come just in time; and perhaps, you sir," bowing to Mr. Belknap, "may conclude that my amateur work has not been quite thrown away, or misapplied."

"Pray give me details," said the detective, consulting his watch, which was a huge silver affair, quite in keeping with the disguise he still wore. "I must economise my time, as much as may be, and shall be glad to hear all you have to tell—at once. Miss Wardour instructs me to act in this matter, according to my best judgment, and that tells me to shorten my stay here, and commence a search in the city."

"All I know is soon told," said young Lamotte, with a light laugh. "I rode a great many miles, and asked a great many useless questions. Yesterday, however, I learned that two men had boarded a freight train bound cityward, at daybreak, Sunday morning, at Blair, a little watering station, some fifteen miles from here. I could not get a very accurate description of them. They were below the medium size, I should judge, wearing loose-fitting dark gray garments, and soft hats, pulled well down over their faces. The man at the tank tells me he noticed distinctly that one of them wore very large and heavy boots, and that they were daubed here and there with red clay. Acting upon this hint, I rode some four miles south-east from Blair, knowing that there is a piece of marsh field, which the highway crosses, that has a reddish, clayey soil. Here, after asking a good many wrong persons, I found at last the right one, in the person of a farmer who, hearing some unusual noise among his cattle, arose before daybreak, and, going toward his barn, noticed two shadowy forms crossing the field just beyond. They were coming from the south, he said, and he watched them until they climbed the fence and struck into the road leading toward Blair. It was too dark for him to see them distinctly, but as they were then crossing a red loam field, we are safely to conclude that they were the two who, a little later, took to the freight cars at the water station."

Mr. Belknap had been for some moments writing rapidly in a small memorandum book, and as Francis ceased speaking, Constance, after a moment's silence, said, more to relieve the stillness than with a desire for any further intelligence:

"And is that all, Frank?"

"That is enough," interposed the detective, before the young man could reply. "Mr. Lamotte, let me congratulate you; you have done well. This confirms my theory, and gives me something to start from when I reach the city. I shall go now with a light heart, and a more than moderate hope of success."

"Then your business here is about accomplished?" asked Francis.

"It is accomplished, thanks to you. I would like," glancing as he spoke, into his

note-book, "to talk this matter over with you further. It is possible I might see you again before leaving for the city. At present—" he broke off abruptly, and glanced at Constance.

"I understand," laughed she nervously; "at present you require my assistance about that list of jewels. Frank, you will remain here with Aunt Honor for a short time; she has, I think, something to say to you. We will go to the library, Mr. Belknap," and she turned toward the door.

"Don't hurry matters so, please," expostulated Francis. "Let me say a little word to Mr. Belknap before you carry him off. His business here being so nearly done, the necessity for extra caution ceases, does it not? At least, it would not injure the cause if I carry him over to Mapleton to luncheon, will it, think you? You won't leave for the city before to-night, Mr. Belknap, I hope?"

"You are very good," said the detective, with some hesitation. "But, if you please, we will renew this subject a little later; now, just excuse me," and before the bewildered young man could raise his voice to intercept them, Constance and Mr. Belknap had passed from the room, and he found himself alone with Mrs. Aliston. Turning toward that lady, he was surprised at the look of intent pity she was bending on him, and, remembering the words of Constance, he came close beside her, saying:

"You had something to say to me madam?"

"Yes, Frank." He almost started upon hearing his name falling so gently from her lips. She was not used to familiarity in addressing him. "Prepare yourself to receive a shock, a terrible shock." A look of uneasiness, but not of alarm, came over his countenance.

"What is it?" he asked hastily. "Has Evan—done something worse than usual?"

"Not to my knowledge. It is not Evan."

"Not Evan! what then? Tell me, Mrs. Aliston," his face becoming paler and paler.

"Frank, your sister has eloped!"

He fell into the nearest chair, white and limp.

"Go on," he whispered hoarsely, lifting a haggard face toward her; "tell me—the worst, Mrs. Aliston."

"She has eloped with John Burrill," went on Mr. Aliston, a shade of coldness in her voice. "They ran away on Saturday afternoon."

His head dropped forward and fell upon the table before him. Thus for a moment he remained motionless; then his voice broke the stillness, sounding faint and hollow.

"Is that—all—you can tell me?"

"All! Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Aliston in a burst of nervousness. "I wish I had not told you so much. Frank, don't take it so hard."

He lifted his head, showing her a ghastly face and pale trembling lips.

"Did Constance see Sybil? Does she know—" he broke off abruptly and half rising from his chair, stretched out to her an imploring hand.

"Mrs. Aliston," he said hoarsely. "I must see Constance. I *must*. For God's sake send her to me, just for one moment."

"But—" began Mrs. Aliston.

"I tell you I *must* see her," he cried, with sudden fierceness. "I shall go to her if there is no other way."

Great drops of sweat stood out on his forehead; once more he looked as he had two days before, when he stood alone under the trees of Wardour Place, after his parting with Constance.

Seeing that look upon his face, Mrs. Aliston went slowly towards the door.

"I will send Constance to you," she said gently and went out, closing the door softly.

When he was alone the look upon Francis Lamotte's face became fierce and set. Springing to his feet he paced the floor like a madman.

"That letter," he hissed, "that accursed letter, what has it told? I must know! I must know the worst! Blind fool that I was, to let my own hand bring this about. Oh! this is horrible! Am I lost or—"

Suddenly he seemed to recollect himself and dropping into a chair he buried his passion-distorted face in his arms and so awaited the coming of Constance.

He had not long to wait; soon his listening ear caught the gentle opening and closing of the door, and then he felt a light hand upon his arm, and a sweet pitying voice said: "Poor Frank, poor boy; don't let this overcome you so."

One hand reached up and clasped the soft hand that rested on his arm, but he did not lift his head, as he said brokenly:

"Tell me the worst, Constance."

"Why, Frank! the worst is told."

"But," his hand tightened its clasp, "*you* know more than she has told me."

"No, Frank, nothing more."

He lifted his pale face again.

"Constance—that letter!"

She started and flushed.

"What letter, Frank?"

"You know," his eyes scanning her face angrily. "Her letter. The one I brought you two days ago. What was it?"

She drew away her hand.

"It was a note of farewell, Frank. Nothing more."

"Then she told you—?" he gasped, caught his lips between his teeth, and waited for her to finish the sentence.

"She told me nothing, Frank. Oh, I wish she had."

He sprang up, overturning his chair in his hasty excitement.

"Nothing?" he cried, "she told you *nothing?*"

"Absolutely nothing. The letter was an enigma. How strange you act, Frank. I can't understand you."

Slowly the life-colour returned to his cheeks and lips, as he answered, or stammered:

"Pardon me, Constance. I thought—I feared—I hoped there might be some explanation. I thought she must have given you some reason for so horrible a step. Are you sure there is no hint, no clue to help us?"

"Frank, listen: Sybil's note explained nothing. It only implored me not to think harshly of her, when I should know what she had done, and bade me farewell. I could not comprehend its meaning until the news reached me that she had fled."

"And you cannot guess why she did this thing?"

"No."

He turned away, putting his hand up before his face, and uttering a groan. Then he moved toward one of the French windows, pushed it open, and leaned out.

"I feel as if I were going mad," he muttered. "Constance, pardon me; I must have the air. I must be alone to think, and to face this—this disgrace that has come upon us."

And he stepped through the open window, and reeleed rather than walked down the steps, and out among the trees.

Constance watched him until the shrubbery hid him from view, and then, with a quick, nervous glance about the room, and out at the windows, she went to the door which shut our tramp detective from view, but not from hearing.

"Come out," she whispered hurriedly. "Now is your time to escape."

He came out, shaking himself like a water-dog.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "I have been in one position too long."

"I am sorry," began Constance.

"Not for me," he interrupted. "Like most listeners, I heard what I did not bargain for; but—I have not heard too much. Miss Wardour, don't reproach yourself, or Fate; that little extra hearing was a godsend. And now, let me out, quickly, before someone else claims your time."

She looked cautiously out into the hall, then closed the door again.

"I wish I could know your opinion regarding this business—all of it," she said wistfully. "I begin to feel helpless, like a rudderless mariner."

"It's a hard knot," he said, going toward the door; "a very hard knot. But we will untie it, Miss Wardour, and then you will understand all these things. Now tell me, where is your detective going next?"

"I do not know."

"You must find out," imperatively.

"I think I can."

"And come to me in the garden."

"Very well," looking out once more. "Your way is clear, sir; go straight to the kitchen entrance."

He passed out, and went his way, swiftly, quietly, and unobserved; and Constance returned to Mr. Belknap, and the completion of her jewel list.

"The combat deepens," mused the tramp detective, as he paced slowly down the garden walk. "The plot, thickens. I come for a catfish,—I may catch a whale. Oh, what a knot; what a beautiful, delightful, horribly hard knot; and how my fingers itch to begin at it. But soft—easy; there is more to be tied in. Let us pay out the rope, and wait."

CHAPTER X.

EVAN.

Miss Wardour and the private detective had just completed their work of transferring to paper a minute description of the Wardour diamonds, when the door opened quietly, and Francis Lamotte, pale, heavy-eyed, but quite composed, appeared before them.

"Have you finished your work?" he asked wearily. "If so, may I intrude?"

"Come, by all means," replied Constance, gently. "You are not intruding, Frank."

"Thank you." He came forward, and sank listlessly into a chair. "Constance, who brought you this news about—Sybil?"

Constance glanced towards the detective, and Francis, interpreting the look, hastened to say:

"It is known to Mr. Belknap, I presume—this shameful business. There is no use of secrecy, where all the world is already agape. My sister, you tell me, has eloped with a low brute. I am numbed with the horror of it. But I must hear it all; every word, every particular. Who brought you the news, Constance?"

"Doctor Heath," replied the girl, icily.

"Ah!"

The interjection came through shut teeth, and just for a moment the dark shadow flitted across his features; then he said, with quiet composure:

"Heath? Ah, yes; and he gave you all the particulars,—all that he had gathered?"

"Doctor Heath told me all that he had learned," she replied, still coldly.

Frank Lamotte arose slowly, wearily.

"I must see Heath," he said, taking up his hat. "It is small wonder that you speak so frostily to the brother of a girl who has disgraced herself, Constance. However, I realise my fall; henceforth, I know my place."

The detective arose and moved uneasily to the window.

"I am sorry to hear this absurdity, Frank," said Constance, with some severity. "You know my position always in these matters; only yourself can injure yourself in my eyes; and I am sorry to hear you speak thus of Sybil. I have yet to be convinced that in some manner, she is not more a victim than disloyal. *I* have not condemned her; why should you, her brother?"

A hot flush came over the young man's face, and his eyes glowed with a strange light. He shifted his position uneasily; then, abruptly, he turned to the detective.

"If under the circumstances, and having seen my mood, you care to accept my hospitality, it is still extended, sir," he said, somewhat awkwardly; "will you accompany me to town, and afterwards lunch with me?"

"I will accompany you to the town," replied the detective, coming back from the window; but I fear I must decline your hospitality for to-day; another time, perhaps."

Francis bowed stiffly, then turned to Constance.

"Constance, good-bye," he said, mournfully, and holding out his hand. "I will not displease you again; I will keep at a safe distance."

"You will displease me by doing that," she replied, kindly, at the same time extending her hand. "I mean by staying away; I want you to come often, and to bring me any news that may come from Sybil. Remember, I intend to be her champion, and you must be mine."

"Then I *may* come as a bringer of news?" he asked.

"You may come as usual," she retorted, a trifle sharply, "and come *especially* when there is news."

"Thank you;" he bowed over her hand, then turned to the private detective.

"Good morning, Miss Wardour," said that individual, coming forward;" it is probable that I shall not see you again, as I will leave for the city this evening, but you will hear from me as the case progresses, or it is possible that I may find it expedient to pay this place another visit."

"In which case, you will of course present yourself," smiled Constance. "May I ask where you intend to pass your time until you leave for the city, sir?"

"I can hardly say; about the town, as it may happen."

"Ah! Pardon the question; I was thinking of the business in hand; you can hardly hope to find anything new in the village."

"One can never tell, Miss Wardour. If I do learn anything new, you shall hear from me. Present my adieus to Mrs. Aliston, and once more good day."

Constance watched the two as they walked away together, the handsome lithe form of the younger man in such marked contrast with the shambling gait of the detective. Only for a moment, however; then she went swiftly through the halls, out at a rear entrance, and down the path toward the rear gardens.

Here she found the tramp detective busy, or pretending to busy himself with a small pruning-knife.

"If you want to follow him, you must make haste," she said, breathlessly; "he is walking townward with Mr. Lamotte; intends to loiter about the town and take some evening train."

"Pray don't appear so much excited," said the tramp detective, dropping his pruning-knife, and picking it up again with great de-

liberation. "There is a man coming up from the river; he must be getting pretty near us. No, don't look now."

"Dear me!" began Constance.

"Listen," he went on, without regarding her ejaculation. "I am going to leave here in two minutes; you can say that you have discharged me. I may not see you again for months. I may return at any time. I may as well warn you here, not to *confide* anything to Mr. Belknap; at another time you will learn why. Another thing, it is just possible that you may need my services at some future time. I was about to give you an address that will reach me at any time, but we may be observed by that fellow who is coming. I will send you by mail a card containing the address. Pray call upon me if you need my aid. I hope Belknap will find your robbers, but you were wise not to tell him that you had saved your diamonds. Keep your counsel on that subject always, Miss Wardour; it will save you trouble. And now you had better move on. I intend to follow and overtake your two departing guests."

He turned carelessly away as he spoke, and Constance, after a pretence of examining the shrubbery, faced about and walked a few paces down the path, then lifting her eyes carelessly, they fell upon the intruder. Uttering a low ejaculation of surprise, she hastened toward him.

"Evan! why Evan!" she cried, anxiously. "You look ghostly, and you must be in trouble."

"Or I would not be here," said Evan Lamotte, bitterly. "Evan, the ne'er-do-well, does not seek his friends when the sun shines. Eh, Conny? Don't go in," laying one hand upon her arm, as she was about to turn toward the house, "I—I came to talk with you."

"But you will come in, Evan?"

"No, I should fall out with your old cat—I beg pardon, Con., I mean your old aunt—directly."

"Aunt Honor shut herself in her own room an hour ago, child; she has been worn out with too much excitement. We have had a detective here all the morning, not to mention Frank, who has made a wonderful discovery."

"I dare say," muttered the young fellow, dryly, "Frank will make another wonderful discovery soon. Conny," clutching at her arm again, "*have you heard?*"

"Have I heard what, Evan?"

"About Sybil—my sister," his voice broke, ending in a sob.

"Yes, Evan," she replied, very gently, "I have heard."

It was noticeable, the difference between her treatment of this younger brother of Sybil Lamotte and the one who had just gone.

With Francis she had preserved, even while her heart was full of sympathy and pity for his trouble, a certain dignity even in her kindness, an arm's length repellant stateliness, that galled and tormented the ardent, impulsive, and too eager young man. With Evan she was all pity, all sympathy, full of familiar sisterly kindness and patience.

Women are strange creatures; we may be as handsome as the Apollo, and they will steel their hearts against us. If we would have the confidence, the caresses, the tenderest love of a pitying woman, we must be mentally, or morally, or physically maimed, or halt, or blind.

Evan Lamotte was one of the world's unfortunates, and the pitying heart of the fair heiress had no scorn for such as he. A black sheep, so they called Evan Lamotte, not yet of age, with a slender physique, a pale, handsome face, handsome in spite of his dissipations. He seemed possessed of an evil spirit, that cried incessantly, "Drink, drink, drink." Every means had been tried to win him from his dissipation; tears, entreaties, threats, bribes, were alike unavailing. In spite of himself, against himself, Evan Lamotte seemed driven downward by a relentless, unseen enemy.

"Reckless, worthless, hopeless." These were the adjectives commonly coupled with his name, and yet his sister had deemed him worth her loving; his mother had deemed him worth her tears, and Constance Wardour had deemed him worth her pitying kindness.

"Constance," he choked back the sobs that arose in his throat; "don't think that I have been drinking; when a fellow like me is grieved almost to madness, you can call him maudlin, but I never cry in my cups, Con. And I have been perfectly sober since Saturday night, or if you like, yesterday morning. I drank hard all that day after they told me, Con., but not one drop since; not one. Con., tell me what you have heard?"

"About all that is known, I think, Evan. Oh, Evan! do you know, can you guess, why she has done this—this terrible thing? Come down this walk, Evan; let us sit under that tree, on that bench."

She moved toward the spot indicated, he

following mechanically, and seating himself beside her, in obedience to her gesture.

"Do I know the reason?" he repeated. "Do I guess it? Oh, if I could guess it; it has haunted me every moment; that strong desire to know what drove my sister to this fate. It is the question I came here to ask. Con., help me to think; she must have said something; must have given you some hint.

"Alas! But she never did."

"And you cannot guess; you have no clue to help us unravel this mystery?"

Constance shook her head.

"Con., oh, Con., *you* don't think, you can't think, that she loved that—that beast?"

"No, Evan, I can't think that."

"Then," excitedly; "you must think as I do; that there is a mystery; that there has been foul play. Con., I don't care for anything on earth, except Sybil; I *must* know what has driven her to this; I must help her; I can help her; I can take her from that brute."

His face was livid, and his eyes glowed with the fierce light that we have seen in the eyes of his elder brother. Constance saw the growing excitement, and sought to soothe it.

"Evan, let us not anticipate," she said, gently. "All that we can do for Sybil shall be done, but it must be with her consent. When does your father come?"

"I don't know," sullenly; "I telegraphed him Saturday; he will come to-day, no doubt. But he will come too late."

"Alas, yes; I regret so much that it was for my sake he was absent from home at such a time, and Frank, too."

"Frank? Bah! What could he do? What could any one do?"

She turned, and scanned his face keenly.

"Evan, you suspect, or you know something."

"I have a thought," he replied. "I hardly dare call it a suspicion. If I could know it to be the truth," he hissed, between set, white teeth, "I should know what to do, then."

"Don't look like that, Evan; you look wicked."

"I feel wicked," he cried, fiercely. "You can never guess how wicked. When I think of that brute, that beast, that viper, of the power he must hold over *her*, I am mad, crazed. But he will come back, and then—then I will murder him, and set her free."

With his gleaming eyes, his clenched hands, his white, uplifted face, he looked like a beautiful evil demon. Constance shuddered as she gazed, and then her hand closed firmly upon his arm, as she said:

"Evan, listen. Do you think it would lighten Sybil's burden to hear you rave thus? Do you want to make her lot still harder to bear? Sybil loves you. Would it make her heart lighter to have you embroil yourself for her sake? You know your faults. If you let this hideous idea take place in your mind now, it will break out some day when the demon possesses you. If Sybil Lamotte returns, and hears you utter such threats, she will have an added torture to bear; she will have two curses instead of one. You cannot help Sybil by committing an act that would cut you off from her for ever. You have caused her heartaches enough already. See, now, if you cannot lighten her burden in some different, better way. But all this is superfluous, perhaps. I wonder if Sybil will come back, at all?"

Lower and lower sank his head, as he listened, and then something that she had said seemed to chain and hold his thoughts.

Slowly the evil light faded from his eyes, and into his face crept a strange, fixed look. Forgetful of time, or of his companion's presence, his thoughts followed the new course, his hands clenching and unclenching themselves, his teeth burying themselves from time to time in his thin under lip. So long he sat thus, that Constance herself, from watching and wondering at his strange mood, wandered off into a sad reverie, the subject of which she could hardly have told, it was such a vague mixture of Sybil's sorrows and her own unrest.

After a time he stirred as if arousing himself with difficulty from a nightmare; and Constance, recalled to herself in turn, looked up to encounter his gaze, and to be astonished at the new, purposeful self-restraint upon his face, and the inscrutable intentness of his eye.

"Con.," he said slowly, even his voice seeming to have gained a new strange undertone, "Con., you are an angel. You have set me on my feet."

"On your feet, Evan?"

"Yes, on my feet, mentally at least. I don't suppose any one could set me permanently on my physical, corporeal pins. Beg pardon for the slang, Conny, I don't forget how you and Sybil used to lecture me for that, and my other vices. Poor sis; she had given up the drink talks latterly, given me over as hopeless,

and so I am. Con., I have made a new resolve."

Constance smiled faintly.

"Oh, you smile. You think I am going to swear off again. No, Con., that's of no use; I should know myself for a liar all the time. I shall never quit liquor; I *can't*, and I tell you," he whispered this fiercely, "they *know that I can't*, and they know *why* I can't. Oh! you need not recoil; we are not the first family that has inherited a taint; and I am the one unfortunate in whom that taint has broken forth. Let me tell you a secret; since my first potation, my mother has never once remonstrated with me, never once upbraided; my proud, high-tempered mother. She knows the folly of trying to reclaim the irreclaimable." But, lowering his voice, sadly, "My mother never loved me."

She shuddered at the tone, knowing that this last statement, at least, was all too true, and, to direct his thoughts from so painful and delicate a subject, said:

"And your resolve, then, Evan?"

"My resolve," his mouth settling into hard lines once more. "Oh, that! Well, it is a resolve you put into my head, Con.; although I'll swear the thought was never in *your* mind. I have resolved to act upon your advice: to curb my heathenish temper, and to *help Sybil*, when the *right time comes*, in the right way."

She looked at him fixedly.

"Evan, are you sure this last state of your mind is not worse than the first?"

He laughed, ironically.

"How hard it is to make you believe that any good exists in me."

"Oh, not that, Evan, but you look so strange; not so wild as before, but—"

"Just as wicked."

"Well, yes!"

"Well, Con., you can't expect a fellow to feel pious all in an instant; mine is a pious resolve, and the proper feeling must follow. Isn't that about how they preach it?"

"That's about how they preach it, sir. Now listen: I don't intend to stir one step, or allow you to stir, until you have explained some of your dark sayings; you are going to tell me what this new resolve is."

Evan glanced at her from under his long lashes, and seemed to hesitate. He knew that Constance, in what he had sometimes termed her "imperative mood," was a difficult element to contend with. But he was not quite prepared to divulge just the precise thoughts that were in his mind.

"Con.," he said, slowly, "do you think, if my sister came back very penitent, or very miserable, that my father would take her home?"

"I don't know, Evan."

"Well, that's another of the things that brought me to you. I was overwhelmed with misery, and my head was chaos. I was wild to wreak vengeance upon that man, and filled with dread at the thought that Sybil might come back and meet with no welcome. I believe she will come. I know that man would not miss the triumph of bringing her back among us. Now, Con., my father thinks you infallible, and you can do anything with Frank. I want you to see them, and make them take Sybil home, when she comes. Yes, and John Burrill, too, if she *will* have him."

"Why, Evan!"

"Then," he went on, breathlessly, "the world must have a reason for this marriage; for, not the greatest fool in W—— will believe that Sybil freely chose that villain. Do you pave the way for Sybil's return; I will find a reason for the marriage,—a bone to throw to the dogs. For, I tell you, Con., the true reason will never be told."

Thinking of Sybil's letter, Constance could but agree with him in this; and that letter, too, had caused her to think that Sybil had expected, or hoped, or feared, a return to W——; which, she could only guess.

"You will furnish a reason, Evan? You are mystifying me."

"Never mind that. I, Evan Lamotte, worthless, black sheep, sot; *I* will find a reason, I tell you; one that will not be questioned, and that will spare Sybil."

"And what then?"

"Then, aided by you, Sybil can come back to us. Aided by my new strong resolve, I will receive that Burrill,—it nearly chokes me to speak his name,—just as Sybil shall dictate; and then, aided by the old man's money, we may be able to buy him off and get him out of the country."

"Why, Evan Lamotte," cried Constance, with a burst of hopefulness, "you have actually evolved a practical scheme. I begin to feel less hopeless."

"Oh, I have a brain or two left, when a firm hand, like yours, shakes me up, sets me straight, and gets me in running order. Will you help, Con.?"

"Will I help! Sybil Lamotte, if she comes back, will be warmly welcomed by me, and by all W——, if I can bring it about."

He sprang to his feet and seized her hands. "Thank you, Conny," he cried; "my heart is lightened now; I can 'bide my time,' as the novels say. Only do your part, Con."

"Trust me for that. Now come to luncheon, Evan."

He dropped her hands, and turned away abruptly.

"I won't! I can't," he said, almost gruffly. "Go in, Con., and be prepared to welcome Sybil back; and I," he added, moving away, and turning a wicked look over his shoulder, "will be prepared to welcome Burrill." A low, ironical laugh followed these words, and Evan Lamotte leaped the low garden palings, and went back as he had come, by the river way.

"What can that strange boy mean," thought Constance, gazing after him; "he makes me nervous, and yet he was reasonable after his fashion. Poor Evan, he is indeed unfortunate; here he has been breaking his heart over Sybil, and before night he may be singing in some saloon, in a state of mad intoxication. Altogether, they are a very uncomfortable pair to entertain in one half-day, Frank and Evan Lamotte."

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING.

Doctor Clifford Heath sat alone in his office at half-past eleven o'clock. His horse, "all saddled and bridled," stood below in the street, awaiting him. On a small stand, near the door, lay his hat, riding-whip, gloves. On the desk beside him, lay a small pyramid of letters and papers, and these he was opening, and scanning in a careless, leisurely fashion, with his chair tilted back, his heels on high, his entire person very much at ease.

Over one letter he seemed to ponder, blowing great clouds of smoke from the secret depths of a huge black Dutch pipe the while. Finally, he laid letter and pipe aside, lowered his feet, wheeled about in his chair, drew pen, ink, and paper before him on the desk, and began to write rapidly only a few lines, and the letter was done, and signed, and sealed, with grim satisfaction; then he gathered up his scattered missives, and locked them away carefully.

"I won't go back," he muttered, picking up his pipe once more. I wouldn't go now for a kingdom; I won't be put to rout by a woman, and that is just what it would amount to. I'll see the play played out, and I'll stay in W——."

Again the smoke puffed out from the black pipe; again the heels were elevated, and, drawing some papers toward him, Dr. Heath began to absorb the latest news, looking as little like a jilted lover or a despairing swain, as possible.

Presently the office door opened to admit a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed young man, of aristocratic bearing and handsome countenance, but looking extremely haggard and heavy-eyed.

Doctor Heath turned his head lazily at the sound of the opening door, but seeing who his visitor was, he laid his pipe aside and rose with kindly alacrity.

"Come along, Ray, old fellow," he said cheerily. "Why you look as if the witches had made your bed."

"It's about the way I feel, too," said the new comer, dropping wearily into the easy chair pushed toward him. "Heath, you are a good fellow, and I can't blame you for thinking me a cad. Don't stop your smoke."

"Why as to that," replied the doctor, easily, and taking a long pull at his pipe, "we are all cads, more or less, in certain emergencies, and yours was an unusually severe blow. We all have to take them in some shape or other, at one time or another; these soft hands hit hard, but—it's the penalty we pay for being sons of Adam. Although now that I come to think of it, I can't recall that I ever insisted upon being a son of Adam."

"Why!" said Raymond Vandyck, opening his eyes in languid surprise, "you talk as if *you* had received one of those hard hits."

"So I have, my boy; so I have," he replied *debonairly*. "If I were a woman I would get out a fresh handkerchief and tell you all about it. Being a man I—smoke."

Young Vandyck sighed heavily, and picked up a newspaper, running his eye listlessly over the columns. Here was another upon whom the flight of Sybil Lamotte had fallen a heavy blow. He had loved Sybil since they were boy and girl, and lately for a few short months they had been betrothed; then Sybil had asked to be released, and in such a manner that it left him no room for remonstrance. The engagement had been broken, but the young man had not quite abandoned hope.

Now, however, hope had deserted him,

Sybil was lost to him utterly, and hearing the news of her flight he had rushed into Doctor Heath's presence a temporary madman. He could not have found a wiser or more sympathetic friend and adviser, and he fully realised this fact. The doctor's patience, delicacy, and discretion had screened him from the prying eyes and prating tongues of the curious ones, who were anxious to probe his wounds, and see how "Vandyck would take it," and had made him his firm friend for always.

Ever since the advent of Doctor Heath, Vandyck had been one of his warmest admirers, and this admiration had now ripened into a sincere and lasting friendship.

"You are a good fellow, Heath," said Vandyck, suddenly throwing down his paper. "I want to tell you that I appreciate such kindness as you did me. I don't suppose you would ever go off your head like that. I shan't again."

"No, I don't think you will," responded the doctor soberly. "As for going off my head, Lord bless you, man, it's in the temperament. I might never lose my head in just that way. We're not made alike, you see. Now I should be struck with a dumb devil, and grow surly and cynical as time went on; and of all contemptible men a cynic is the worst. You will have your burst of passion, and carry a tender spot to your grave, but you can't squeeze all the sunshine out of your soul, any more than out of your Saxon face."

Vandyck laughed dismally.

"It's hard lines, however," he said. "But I'm bound to face the music. Only—I wish I could understand it."

"So do all her friends. Ray, let me give you a little advice."

"Well."

"After a little, go call on Miss Wardour and talk with her about this affair. I think she knows as much as is known, and I am certain she has not lost her faith in her friend."

"Thank you, Heath; I will."

Just here the office door admitted another visitor in the form of Francis Lamotte.

He, too, looked pale and worn, but he carried his head erect, if not with some defiance. "Do, Heath. Morning, Vandyck," he mumbled, flinging himself upon a settee with scant ceremony. "You will excuse me from asking 'what's the news?'"

"I should ask what's the matter?" retorted Clifford Heath, eyeing him closely.

"Fix me up one of your potions, Heath," replied Francis, drawing a hard deep breath. "I've had another of those cursed attacks."

Dr. Heath arose and went slowly toward a cabinet, slowly unlocked it, and then turned and surveyed his patient.

"Another attack," he said somewhat severely, "the second one in three days, and not a light one, if I can judge. Let me tell you, Lamotte, you must not have a third of these attacks for some time to come."

"I won't," replied Lamotte, with a nervous laugh. "This one has done me up; I feel weak as a kitten, meek as a lamb."

"Humph;" this from Doctor Heath, who proceeded to drop into a druggist's glass sundry globules of dark liquid, which he qualified with other globules from another bottle, and then half filling the glass with some pale brandy, handed it to Lamotte who drained it off eagerly.

"Physician, heal thyself," quoted Raymond Vandyck, watching the patient with some interest. "Why don't you do your own dosing, Lamotte?"

"I'm shaky," replied Lamotte, lifting an unsteady hand. "And then we are advised to have faith in our physician. I should swallow my own mixture with fear and trembling."

"And pour it down your neighbour's throat with entire satisfaction," interpolated Doctor Heath.

"Precisely, just as you pour this stuff down mine. Thanks, Heath," handing back the glass. "Now then, we are all friends here, and you two know what I wish to learn. Heath," shading his eyes with his hand as he reclined on the settee. "I came back, from a two day's tramp about the country in search of Miss Wardour's robbers, or of traces of them, this morning. Let that pass. I called at Wardour Place first of all, have just come from there in fact—and Constance tells me—"

He paused as if struggling with some emotion, and Ray Vandyck stirred uneasily, flushed slightly, and partially turned away his face. Only Clifford Heath retained his stoical calm.

"Well!" he said coolly, "Miss Wardour tells you—what?"

"That my sister has run—away."

"Oh! Well, Lamotte, I am glad you know it. It's a hard story to tell a friend."

"So thought Constance, and she would give me no particulars; she told me," letting his hand fall from before his face, "to come to you."

"And why to me?" coldly.

"She said that you knew the particulars—that you brought her the news."

"True; I did. Still it's a hard story to tell, Lamotte."

"And no one will tell it more kindly, I know. Say on, Heath; don't spare me, or mind Vandyck's presence—I don't. I know that I must bear this thing, and I know that Ray is my friend. Go on, Heath; get it over soon."

Raymond Vandyck arose and walked to the window, standing with his back toward them while Doctor Heath, in a plain, straightforward, kindly manner, told the story of Sybil's flight, just as he had told it to Constance Wardour.

For a long time after the story was done, Lamotte lay with his face buried in his arms, silent and motionless, while young Vandyck stood like a graven image at his post by the window.

Finally, Lamotte brought himself to a sitting posture, and, with the look and tone of a man utterly crushed, said:

"Thank you, Heath. You have done me a kindness. This is the most terrible, most unheard of thing. My poor sister must be mad. She has *not* been herself, now that I remember, for some weeks. Something has been preying upon her spirits. There has been—by heavens! Ray, Ray Vandyck, can you guess at the cause of this madness?"

Raymond Vandyck wheeled suddenly, and came close to his interlocutor, the hot, angry blood surging to his face.

"There was plenty of 'method in this madness,'" he sneered. "As to the *cause*, it may not be so hard to discover as you seem to imagine." And, before they could recover from their astonishment, he was out and away, banging the door fiercely as he went.

For a moment the lurid light gleamed in Frank Lamotte's eye, and it seemed that another "attack" was about to seize him, but he calmed himself with a mighty effort, and turning toward Doctor Heath, said, plaintively:

"Has all the world run mad, Heath? What the devil does that fellow mean?"

"I know no more than you, Lamotte," said the doctor, upon whose face sat a look of genuine surprise. "I don't think he quite knows himself. He has been sadly worked up by this affair."

"Humph! I suppose so. Well, for Sybil's sake, I forgive him, this once; but—I hope he will outgrow these hallucinations."

"Doubtless he will," replied the doctor, somewhat drily. "I say, Lamotte, you had better run down to my house, and turn in for a couple of hours; you look done up,—and you can't stand much more of this sort of thing. I must go now, to see old Mrs. Grady, over at the mills."

"Then I will just stretch myself here, Heath," replied Lamotte. "I don't feel equal to a start out just now; and, look here, old fellow," turning a shade paler, as he spoke, "deal gently with a fallen rival after this—disgrace. Of course, I quit the field; but—don't ride over me too hard."

The doctor drew on his riding-gloves with grave precision, put his hat on his head, and took up his riding-whip: then he turned toward Lamotte.

"I suppose you refer to Miss Wardour?" he said blandly.

"Of course."

"Then rest easy. I do not pretend in that quarter. Miss Wardour is yours for all me; and—you are not such a fool as to think that she will let your sister's affair alter her feelings for you—if she cares for you?"

Lamotte sprang up, staring with surprise.

"Why, but—Heath, you owned yourself my rival?"

"True."

"And—upon my word, I believe you were ahead of the field."

"True again; but—*I have withdrawn.*" And Doctor Heath went out, closed the door deliberately, and ran lightly down the stairs. He found Ray Vandyck loitering on the pavement.

"I knew you would be down presently," said Vandyck, anxiously; "I want to say, Heath, don't notice what I said to that cad. He maddened me; above all, don't think that one word I uttered was intended to reflect upon *her*."

"He has withdrawn," muttered Francis Lamotte, settling himself back as comfortably as possible, and clasping his hands behind his head.

"And *he* means what he says; something has happened in my absence; I can't understand it, but it's so much the better for me."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

SATURDAY, Sunday, Monday; three days, three nights. The events chronicled in the foregoing chapters crowded themselves into the space of three days.

But these were exceptional days; life does not move on thus, especially in the usually staid and well-regulated town of W——. Men and women are not qualified to run a long, high-pressure race. Action, and then—reaction. Reaction from every emotion, every sorrow, every joy. God help us.

We weep for days, but not for years. We suffer, but here and there comes a respite from our pain. We live in a delirium of joy for a brief space, and vegetate in dulness, in apathy, in hardness of heart, in indifference, or in despair, according to our various natures, for the rest of our natural lives. So let it be; it is the lot common to all.

"No man can hide from it, but it will find him out,
Nor run from it, but it overtaketh him."

After the robbery, after the flight, after the coming and departure of the two detectives, dullness settled down upon our friends in W——.

It is needless to chronicle the effect of the news of their daughter's flight upon Mr. and Mrs. Lamotte.

That is a thing we can all understand; we can picture it for ourselves.

Mrs. Lamotte shut herself up in her chamber, and refused to be comforted by family or friends. Mr. Lamotte, bitterly grieved, terribly shocked, did all that a father could do, which was, in effect, nothing.

One day, the mail brought them a copy of the marriage certificate of Sybil Lamotte and John Burrill; but that was all. Where the fugitives had gone could not be discovered.

Francis Lamotte went about as usual; with a little more of haughtiness, a little more reserve, and just a tinge of melancholy in his manner. He took Constance at her word, and came and went very much as of old, but was so watchful over himself, so subdued, and as she thought, improved in manner, that she declared confidentially to her aunt that he had become "really quite a comfortable person to have in one's parlour." She ceased snubbing him altogether, and received him with the frank graciousness that used to charm Doctor Heath; assuring herself, often, that "trouble was improving poor Frank."

Evan Lamotte was Evan Lamotte still. Now drunk, now sober; a little more furious and ready to quarrel than usual, when in his cups; a little more taciturn and inclined to solitude in his sober moments.

Doctor Heath went about among his patients, wearing his usual cheery smile, speaking the usual comforting word, smoking, philosophising, rallying his friends, satirising his enemies, genial, independent, inscrutable as ever. He never called at Wardour Place, of course. He never sought an opportunity for meeting or seeing Constance, and he never avoided her; altogether, his conduct, from a romantic standpoint, was very reprehensible.

And Constance; perhaps of them all, these three days had effected the greatest change in her, as any chain of startling or strange events must, in a measure, change the current of thought and feeling in a life that has hitherto floated under a roseate cloud, on a sea without a ripple. She had been rocked by storm-waves; had seen a bark shipwrecked close beside her; had even encountered mutiny in her own craft; when the lull came, and she drifted quietly, she found herself forever face to face with the facts that sorrow and trouble were abroad in the land, that crime existed outside of the newspapers; that heartache and self-dissatisfaction were possibilities; and that even a queen absolute might come under the shadow of each and all. Not that Constance had never been aware of all these things, but we never can *realise* what we have never experienced.

We look sadly sympathetic, and murmur "Poor things," when we see some mourner weeping over a dead loved one, but we never comprehend the sorrow until we bury our own dead.

Constance had loved Sybil Lamotte as a sister; she thought and sorrowed not a little over the strange freak Fate had played with her friend's life, and she wondered often if Doctor Heath had really lost all regard for her. She knew, as what woman does not, that a warm regard had once existed; and she assured herself that whether he had or not, was a matter of no consequence to her. "She had not the slightest interest in Doctor Heath," so she told Mrs. Aliston, and, like him, she never sought nor avoided a meeting. It is singular, however, that a man who possessed for her "not the slightest interest" should so

often present himself to her thoughts, and certain it is that at this period of our story her mind had a most provoking habit of running away from a variety of subjects straight to Clifford Heath, M.D. But women at best are strange creatures, and subject to singular phenomena.

Mrs. Aliston just here experienced some dissatisfaction: Clifford Heath was with her a favourite; Francis Lamotte was her pet hatred. To see the favourite made conspicuous by his absence, and have his name, like that of a disinherited daughter, tabooed from the family converse, while the obnoxious Francis, because of his provokingly good behaviour, made rapid strides into the good graces of the queen of the castle, would have exasperated most good, manœuvering old ladies, but Mrs. Aliston manœuvred principally for her own comfort, so she sighed a little, regretted the present state of affairs in a resigned and becoming manner, ceased to mention the name of Doctor Heath, and condescended to receive Francis graciously, after that young man had made a special call, during which he saw only Mrs. Aliston, and apologised amply and most humbly for his unceremonious ejectment of that lady in favour of Constance, on the day when the former undertook, "as gently as possible," to break to him the news of his sister's flight.

To make an apology gracefully is in itself an art, and this art Francis Lamotte was skilled in; indeed, but for a certain physical weakness, he would have been an ornament to the diplomatic service. Alas, that there must always be a "but" in the way of our moral completeness, our physical perfection, and our life's success.

Days and weeks passed on, and the household of Wardour remained in utmost quiet; that at Mapleton, shrouded in gloom and sorrowful seclusion. Mrs. Lamotte saw no one. Mr. Lamotte went out only to look after his business interests.

When the copy of Sybil's marriage certificate came, Frank, like a loyal knight, came to Constance with the news, told it with a sad countenance and in few words, and went away soon and sorrowfully.

One day, not long after, Mrs. Aliston returned from the town, where she had spent four long hours in calling upon the wives of the Episcopalian, the Unitarian, and the Presbyterian ministers—for Mrs. Aliston was a liberal soul—and hurled herself into Constance's favourite sitting-room in a state of unusual excitement.

"Well, Con.," she panted, pulling hard the while at her squeezed-on gloves, "I've found it out;" and she dropped into the easiest chair and pulled and panted afresh.

Constance looked up from a rather uninteresting "Novel with a Moral," and asked, as indifferently as possible:

"What have you found out, auntie?"

"About Sybil."

Constance laid down her book, and her tone underwent a change.

"If it's anything more than gossip, auntie, tell me quick."

"Oh, it isn't gossip; at least they all say it's true. And as for gossip, Con., I tell you, you have done something toward stopping that."

Con. laughed like one who is conscious of her power.

"Yes, indeed," rattled on Mrs. Aliston. "Mrs. Wooster says, and if she *is* a Unitarian she is a very good and truthful woman, that she has heard from various ones that you have openly declared against the handling of poor Sybil's name among the people who have called themselves her friends, and accepted so often her mother's hospitality. And she said —these are her very words, Con.—'I was delighted, dear Mrs. Aliston, for we all know that these gossip-lovers, every one of them, will deny themselves the luxury of tearing Sybil to pieces, knowing that she has a champion in Miss Wardour.' So much for influence, Con."

"Bah!" retorted Con., wise in her generation. "So much for money; and how do I know that I have not lost my prestige along with my diamonds? Auntie, you have lost the thread of your discourse; you always do."

"So you always tell me," laughed the elderly chatterbox. "Well, Con., they say that Sybil has sacrificed herself."

"Do they?" said Con., sarcastically; "the wise heads. I hope that conclusion has not exhausted their keen intellects, whoever 'they' may be. As if the sacrifice were not patent on the face of the thing."

"Con., you talk like a—a stump orator."

"Do I? Well, I'm glad of it; it would not be so bad to be a 'stump orator,' or any other sort of male animal, for the older I grow the more I incline to the belief that women are fools. But go on, auntie; I believe I get 'riled' every time I hear Sybil's name. What else do 'they' say?"

"You don't deserve to be told, you are so impatient; but I will tell you this once. I was about to add that it seems to be an accepted fact that Sybil sacrificed herself to save Evan from some sort of exposure and disgrace. And they say that some of those rough men in a saloon threw the thing in Evan's teeth, and that he replied in his odd way:

"'Yes, she did it for my sake, and now the first man of you that mentions my sister's name in my hearing will go under.' You know they are afraid of Evan in his rages."

Constance opened her mouth impulsively, but she choked back the words that rushed forward for utterance and closing her lips tightly, sat staring before her, a strange expression creeping into her face.

She seemed to hear anew Evan's words: "Do your part, I will do mine. I, Evan Lamotte, worthless, black sheep, sot; I will find a reason that will not be questioned, and that will spare Sybil."

And he had found a reason. The black sheep was offered up a sacrifice. Evan Lamotte had flung away his last rag of respectability for his sister's sake. Henceforth he would appear in the eyes of the people doubly blackened, doubly degraded, the destroyer of his sister's happiness, the blight upon her life. And yet, he was innocent of this; he was a martyr; he the ne'er-do-well, the inebriate.

Constance was strangely moved by this self-sacrifice, coming from one who was so morally weak; if it had been Frank. But here her lip curled contemptuously; instinctively she knew that such self-sacrifice was not in Frank's nature, any more than was such self-abandonment to weakness. Constance began to wonder if Frank and his parents knew the truth, if they had permitted the weakest shoulders to bear the burden; or, if Evan had deceived them too; and she murmured, almost in the language of the tramp detective:

"It's a thing for time to unravel. It's a play just begun. It's a hard, hard knot."

And, then and there, she took Sybil and Evan to her generous heart of hearts, and mentally resolved to be their champion and friend to the uttermost, while she would judge their parents and their brother according as these dealt by the unfortunates.

It was many days before she saw Evan, for, although in true woman fashion, she longed to scold him first for so sacrificing himself, and praise him after for his generous true-heartedness, she knew that he would only be distressed by such an interview, and would obey a summons from her reluctantly, if at all.

But one day, just as she was driving her ponies out through the gates of Wardour Place, she saw a horseman riding furiously up the road, and a nearer view revealed Frank Lamotte's fine horse, and mounted by Evan.

His eyes mere flaming with excitment, and there was a burning spot of red on either cheek as he reined up his horse beside her, and Constance saw at a glance that, again, he was perfectly sober.

"Conny," he cried breathlessly, "it has come."

"What has come, Evan?"

"The day we hoped for; we have heard from Sybil."

"A letter? Oh, Evan, tell me all about it."

"I can't, there's no time; only, Con., it's your turn now. It's your time to strike for Sybil. They are holding council over the letter, and can't decide. Whether the old gentleman shall go at once and see Sybil; whether they shall bring her back and swallow the Burrill—for, it seems he must be swallowed—and what society will think about it, are the questions that are agitating. Mother says, that Sybil must and shall come back; father says he will go and see her; and Frank—" he broke off abruptly and bent down to look at his saddle girth.

"And Frank; what does he say, Evan?"

"Frank is a fool," snapped Evan irrelevantly. "What *he* says is no matter; only, Conny, now is your time, if you will only have faith in what I say. You are out with your ponies; drive straight to Mapleton, and don't mention me. You will be admitted to mother. Father is there, and Frank; give them the least chance, and they will tell you about Sybil, and then you can manage the rest. Tell them to bring her back, even with that beastly incumbrance. They will listen to you; they won't to me. If you fail me here, then—"

"Then your sacrifice goes for nothing. Oh, Evan, do you think I would not understand that? You have wronged yourself for Sybil's sake. But you shall have a tithe of your reward. And, dear boy, you should not have done this thing; we might have found another way."

"Nonsense, Conny! It was the only way. And what is my life worth, or my reputation, either? It can't hurt a poor devil like me. Con., will you go?"

"I will go straight to Mapleton, Evan.

You shall see that I have faith in you. I will do just as you direct, and all will go well."

"Then I'm off. I stole Frank's horse. I must get him back to avoid a row. Thank you, Conny; you are a true friend."

"Good-bye, Evan. Come to me with all the news, or when you want help."

"I won't forget," wheeling his horse about; then, in a chooking voice, "God bless you, Conny," and a moment later, he was away down the road, galloping in a cloud of dust.

Constance followed in his wake, keeping her ponies at a sober pace.

"I wonder how he found out these things. Poor boy!" she murmured half aloud, "he is not one at their family councils; of that I am sure. His father has lost all patience with him, and yet he knows all that is going on. I wonder how."

If Evan Lamotte had heard this query, and had chosen to answer it, he would have said: "*I watch and I listen.*"

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSTANCE'S DIPLOMACY.

Miss Wardour, being Miss Wardour, was apt to succeed in most things, and it is fair to suppose that her visit to Mapleton, in the character of intercessor for the erring Sybil, was not a fruitless one. Certainly, it was not barren of results.

On the day following the call from Constance, Mrs. Lamotte came forth from her seclusion; her carriage bore her out from the gates of Mapleton, and straight to Wardour Place. Here she took up the heiress and Mrs. Aliston, and the three drove ostentaticusly through the streets of W——, bowing smilingly here and there, as calm, serene, and elegant a trio, to all outward seeming, as ever passed before admiring eyes on velvet cushions.

This act informed W—— that Mrs. Lamotte was once more visible, and "at home," and when a day or two latter, Constance and her Aunt, in splendid array, drove again into W——, calling here and there, and dropping upon each hearthstone a bit of manna for family digestion, the result was what they intended it should be.

"Have you heard the news?" asks Mrs. Hopkins, fashionable busybody, running in for an informal call on Mrs. O'Meara, who is warm-hearted and sensible, and who listens to the babblings of Mrs. Hopkins with a patience and benignity worthy of a Spartan mother.

"No! Well I am dying to tell it, then. Sybil Lamotte is coming back—actually coming back—and that man with her; and won't it be queer? We shall have him in society, of course, for I am told, from the *best* of sources, that the Lamottes will accept him as Sybil's choice, and make the best of him."

"But *we* need not accept him my dear," comments the Spartan mother, whose lawyer husband is rich and independent, and does not count fees. "As for Sybil, she was always a favourite with us; we shall be glad to have her back."

"Yes, that's very well for you and Mr. O'Meara, who are very exclusive, and go out little, but we poor society people will have to submit to the powers that be. Constance Wardour, the Lamottes, the Vandycks, have led us as they would, and queer as it may seem, the Lamottes are backed up in this business of forcing John Burrill upon us by Constance, on one hand, and the Vandycks, mother and son, on the other."

"And Mrs. Aliston?"

"Mrs. Aliston, of course. When did she ever oppose Constance? It's making a great furore, I can tell you; but no one is going to step forward and openly oppose Constance and the Vandycks. I for one am Sybil's staunch friend, and—well, as Constance says, 'Let us take it for granted that this bear of Sybil's has some good qualities, or he would never have won her.' And then, too, it's so romantic, about Evan you know, and how Sybil, in some way, saved him from something, by marrying this man. I never could get the right end, or any end of that story, nor have I found anyone who knows the plain facts. Well, Mrs. O'Meara, I must go; I have seven more calls to make, and I really have talked too long."

"*She'll* take him up fast enough," mused Mrs. O'Meara, in solitude. "That's the way of society; they can't oppose wealth and prestige, even when prestige and wealth command them to fellowship with a grizzly bear; rather they will whitewash their bear, and call him a thing of beauty, and laugh in their silken sleeves to see him dance."

It was quite true, that bombshell of Mrs. Hopkins'—Sybil Lamotte was coming back. Mr. Lamotte went somewhere, nobody could name just the place, and returned, having done, nobody knew precisely what; and as the result of that journey, so said W——, Sybil and John Burrill were coming soon, to breast

the waves of public opinion, and take up their abode in Mapleton.

When this fact became well established, tongues wagged briskly; some were sorry; some were glad; some eager for the advent of the ill-assorted pair.

The sorriest one of all was unhappy Ray Vandyck, who realised how hard a task would devolve upon him; and the gladdest of the glad was poor Evan, who celebrated his rejoicing with one of the wildest and most protracted of all his sprees.

Constance had won Sybil's battle. In accordance with the hint given by Dr. Heath, Raymond Vandyck had called at Wardour Place, and the result of that call was patent to all the eyes of all W——. Ray, the rejected, had gone over to the support of his lost love and taken his mother with him.

At last they came, after the nine days' talk had subsided, after W—— had become accustomed to the idea, quietly, unostentatiously. Before their arrival had become known, they were established at Mapleton.

Everybody admitted that they displayed good taste and judgment in the manner of their home coming; but when, except in the case of this horrible choice of Sybil's, did not the Lamottes display good taste. People said "The Lamottes," without so much as recognising the existence of poor Evan.

Meantime the days were numbering themselves. It was June when Sybil Lamotte fled away with her Bear. It is September before they return; during these three months Constance has heard from Detective Belknap. He is always afar off, always on the track of her robbers, and she reads his report, honours his drafts for "expense money," and troubles her head no more about the "Wardour robbery" or the "Wardour diamonds."

Of Detective Bathurst there came never a word or sign, either to the heiress or to Doctor Heath.

But it is time to introduce our Bear.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN BURRILL, ARISTOCRAT.

MAPLETON stands high on an eminence, which may have arisen expressly to hold, and to exhibit, the splendid edifice erected thereon by Mr. Jasper Lamotte. It is the only hill within sight on that side of the river, and renders Mapleton a most conspicuous as well as most beautiful abiding place.

In front of the dwelling and its grounds flows the river, broad and glittering in the sunshine, on this day of which I write. In the rear stretches a grove, large enough to be termed "the grove" by the people of W——; and dense enough for Robin Hood and his merry men to find comfort in, for Jasper Lamotte has chosen to let it remain *en naturale*, since it first came into his possession.

To reach Mapleton from Wardour Place one must drive directly to the centre of W——, turn eastward, then cross a handsome new iron bridge, and go southward a short distance, coming finally to the broad curve which sweeps up to the mansion, and away from the river, along which the road winds.

In the old days, when Sybil Lamotte and Constance Wardour found excellent reasons for meeting and chatting together, at least once in every twenty-four hours, this fair river was a source of alternate pleasure and annoyance to them. Of pleasure, when the days were fair, and Sybil and Frank could pull their boat up stream, and land at the grassy slope in the rear of Wardour Place, where, often, they found Constance and a gay party awaiting them. Or, when Constance could drift down stream with scarcely the stroke of an oar necessary, until she came opposite "the hill," as Mapleton was often called. Of annoyance, when winds blew cold and rough, and the waters of the river turned black and angry, and surged high between its banks. Then the two young ladies voted the iron bridge "the coldest place possible," and wished that no dark, wintry river flowed between them.

The river is very calm to-day, however; it is flowing gently, murmuring softly, and gleaming silver and blue, beneath a soft September sun. Away down where the factories stand, and the great wheels turn, it loses its blue and silver, flowing under that ever moving, never lifting curtain of smoke, that darkens and dims the skies themselves, and gives to the sun's face the look of a disreputable celestial tramp.

It's always gray "down at the factories," and why not? What need have the toilers there for sunlight? They have work and sleep.

There is nothing gray or dreary about Mapleton, as we enter there and survey the inmates who, just now, are loitering about the lunch table. Nothing gray, if we except a few silver threads in the hair of Mrs. Lamotte; nothing dreary, unless it may be a look which, now

and then, and only for an instant, creeps into the eyes of Mrs. John Burrill.

They sit about the lunch table—all but Sybil. She has arisen, and reseated herself in a great easy chair, which seems to swallow up her slight form, and renders her quite invisible to all at the table, save Evan, who, from time to time, glances furtively across at her.

There may be dissension in this family, but they look the embodiment of high-bred ease and serene contentment.

Jasper Lamotte turns his paper, sips his light wine, speaks suavely, and looks as placid as the sky overhead.

Mrs. Lamotte speaks slow and seldom; smiles when she does speak; and looks as if nothing ever ruffled the placidity of her mind, or the even tenour of her pleasant existence. She looks all this, sitting directly opposite John Burrill, her reluctantly accepted son-in-law, for what Mrs. Lamotte cannot overcome she ignores, and her proud calm is the result of a long and bitter schooling.

Sybil looks paler than is usual for her, but no other expression than one of calmness and *ennui* can be detected on that lovely inscrutable face, and the dusky eyes keep well veiled, and tell no secrets.

Evan Lamotte is sober, and good humoured, for his sister's sake; and Frank is simply lazy.

But John Burrill! there is no contentment equal to his; seated in the easiest of chairs, before a table laden with viands upon which he has just gorged himself, he contemplates his legs and his surroundings with extreme satisfaction; his legs first, because, being stretched directly before him, they come first under his eye; and he is delighted with their size and shape—they are a fine pair, such as would do credit to a bull-fighter or a "champion pedestrian"—and with the quality and cut of the pantaloons that adorn them. It has not always been his good fortune to sit at the rich man's table, and to wear fashionable clothing; and John Burrill appreciates his "marcies." He has feasted his stomach, and John Burrill's stomach comes in for a large share of his consideration; and now he is feasting his senses: this richly appointed room is his room; this splendid stately lady, how he delights to call her "mother," varied occasionally by "mother-in-law;" how he glories in the possession of a pair of aristocratic brothers-in-law; and how he swells with pride, when he steps into the carriage, and, sitting beside "the rich Mr. Lamotte," is driven through W—— and to the factories; and last, and best of all, there is his wife, a beauty, a belle, a heiress, possessing a score of lovers, yet won by him.

Only one thing troubles John Burrill—he does not quite understand Sybil; he has "got the hang," so he thinks, of the other members of the family, but sometimes Sybil's wordless glance operates upon him like a cold shower-bath, and Mr. Burrill, like all the "gutter born," rather fears a shower-bath.

Coarse in sense and sentiment, plebeian in body and soul; whatever else Sybil Lamotte's husband may be, let our story develop.

Quitting his place now, he crosses the room, and, taking up a position where his eyes can gloat upon Sybil's face, he rests one elbow upon a mantel, and so, in a comfortable after-dinner attitude, continues his pleasant meditations. Sybil stirs uneasily, but notices his proximity in no other way. Presently her eyes shoot straight past him, and she says to Evan, who has also risen, and stands stretching himself lazily, with his face to the window and his back toward the assembly—

"Evan, just hand me that book on the mantel. No, not *that* one," as he lays his ready hand on the book nearest him, "the other."

"Oh!" ejaculates Evan, at the same moment laying hand upon a volume directly underneath John Burrill's elbow. "Hoist up your arrum, Burrill. 'My lady's up, and wants her wollum.'"

John Burrill's face reddens slowly. He is an Englishman, and sometimes his H's and A's play him sorry tricks, although he has laboured hard to Americanise himself, and likes to think that he has succeeded.

"D—n it!" broke out the man, suddenly losing his after-dinner calm. "You might have asked *me* for the book, Sybil; it was near enough."

Sybil received the book from Evan's hand, opened it, turned a page or two, and then lifting her eyes to his face, replied in a voice, low, clear, and cutting as the north wind:

"Evan is my slave, Mr. Burrill, *you* are my lord and master." Indescribable contempt shone upon him for a moment from her splendid eyes; then she lowered them, and became, apparently, wholly absorbed in her book.

John Burrill muttered something very low, and probably very ugly, and dropped back into his former attitude; and the others, never by word or glance, noticed this little passage

at arms. Only Evan returned to the window, and standing there with hands in pockets, glowered down upon the frost-touched rose trees and clustered geraniums, savagely, and long.

Presently, Evan turns from the window, which commands a view of the drive.

"Constance is coming," he says, addressing Sybil.

She starts up looking anxious and disturbed. Constance has visited her, and she has driven over once to see Constance; but it has so happened that John Burrill has always been absent, and Sybil has a shuddering horror of this meeting that must be.

The announcement seems to galvanize them all into life. Mr. Lamotte looks up with a gleam of latent anticipation in his eyes; Frank smiles his pleasure; and John Burrill steals a deprecatory glance at a mirror, smoothes a wrinkle out of his waistcoat, and outsmiles Frank. Here is another triumph; he is about to be introduced to the richest girl in the country; to meet her on an equal footing, in the character of husband to her dearest friend.

Sybil rises and goes to the window, her pale face flushing. There is a rolling of wheels, a sound of swift, firm footsteps without, and then the door opens, and Constance is announced.

She follows her name in her usual free, at home fashion, and in a moment is kissing Sybil, shaking hands with Mrs. Lamotte, exchanging smiling salutations with Mr. Lamotte, and gay badinage with Francis. And then, while Sybil still hesitates, Evan comes to the rescue.

With a face of preternatural gravity, he advances, seizes the arm of John Burrill, drags him toward Constance, and says, with elaborate politeness:

"Constance, allow me to present my new brother-in-law, Mr. Burrill. Brother-in-law, this is Miss Wardour, of Wardour Place."

In spite of themselves, they smile; all except Sybil. John Burrill feels that somehow he is made ridiculous; that another man in his place would not have been thus introduced. But the eyes of the heiress are upon his face, her daintily gloved hand is proffered him, and she lies in her softest contralto, and unblushingly:

"I am happy to know you, Mr. Burrill."

Somehow they all breathe freer after that pretty falsehood. John Burrill regains his composure, and relapses into his former state of comfortable gloating. Another face is added to the circle of high-bred people around him. He does not talk much, for he is not yet quite at ease when in conversation with them. As they talk, he thinks what a fine nest this is which he has gained for himself; what a lovely woman is his wife; and how splendidly handsome is Miss Wardour. He thinks how, by and by, he will boast to some of his choice spirits of his friendship for Miss Wardour, and of the value in which she holds his esteem. He thinks how good is the Lamotte cook, and how, presently he will sample the Lamotte wines, and smoke a splendid segar; and then he pricks up his ears and listens, for the conversation has drifted away from the commonplace, and Miss Wardour is saying:

"It really is a forlorn hope, I fear, Mr. Lamotte. I don't know what to reply to Mr. Belknap, but I think he is wasting his time, and I my money; and, if you will communicate with him, as he failed to name his address in his note to me, we will close up the case."

"And say farewell to your diamonds?"

"I have performed that ceremony some time since. I really am worn out with the subject. At some other time I may resume the search."

"You are getting discouraged."

"Call it that if you like."

"Excuse me, if I pursue so wearisome a subject, Constance; but—does not Mr. Belknap hint at a new clue in this note of his? You must know he has written me also."

"He hints, and very vaguely."

"Well, I am anxious to look into this matter a little further. As a special favour to me, will you retain the services of Mr. Belknap a little longer?"

"As you make such a point of it, yes, Mr. Lamotte; but—do you really hope to find anything new, at this late day?"

"I really do, my child, but cannot put my ideas in shape, as yet. I think we shall have Mr. Belknap among us soon."

"Well, don't let him persecute me, that's all," stipulated Constance. "I have lost my faith in detectives."

"All this talk reminds me, Constance," interrupted Sybil, "mamma has had her diamonds reset for me, and they are really beautiful; besides which, papa and Mr. Burrill have added to the collection, so that in the absence of yours, I may set myself up as

diamond queen. Come to my room and be dazzled."

"And leave us under a cloud," chimed in Frank. "Burrill, come, let's adjourn to the billiard-room, and have a segar;" and intent upon keeping his brother-in-law in order during the time Constance should be under the roof, he slapped him cordially on his brawny shoulder, and they went out in most amiable and brotherly fashion, and entered the billiard-room, where Frank permitted Burrill to cheat at the game, and eventually win it, much to the delight of that personage.

When they had left the morning room, Evan Lamotte, too, sauntered out and down the hall, and, hearing their voices in amiable dialogue, interspersed by the click of the billiard balls, he muttered:

"Ah, Constance, you are a witch indeed! You have made my magnificent brother adopt my *role* for once; so long as you are here we may depend upon Frank to keep our bull out of the china shop. So, as one good turn deserves another, I will just give your mare a turn and look in at 'Old Forty Rods;' I'm safe to go off duty for the day."

And ten minutes later the reckless youth was galloping Frank's blooded mare along the highway *en route* for the saloon known to the initiated as "Old Forty Rods."

Left alone together, Mr. Jasper Lamotte and his wife gazed at each other in silence for a moment, and then he said:

"Do you think it safe to leave them alone together too long?"

"Who, Frank and——?"

"Pshaw, no; the girls."

"It is quite safe; nevertheless I will go up to them," and Mrs. Lamotte arose and went slowly up the stairs, and softly past the door where Sybil and Constance sat together, straight to her own room, which she entered, closed and locked the door carefully, and allowing the look of haughty calm to die out of her face, she threw herself into a dressing chair, and pressed two feverish hands against a face that was sad and bitter and full of weariness.

Left to his own devices, Jasper Lamotte seated himself at a desk and dashed off a few hurried lines, which he directed to—

"Mr. Jerry Belknap,
"No.—, Room 7, Blank St.,
"N.Y."

CHAPTER XV.

DIAMONDS.

CONSTANCE followed her friend up to the room where they had so often passed long hours together, wondering inly at Sybil's composure and seeming resignation, and shudderingly recalling the blank devouring stare of the man who was her husband. It was the first time since Sybil's return that they had been alone together, and Constance half dreaded the interview, as well as wondered not a little that the opportunity was of Sybil's own making; hitherto she seemed anxious to avoid a *tête-à-tête*.

Sybil moved straight on in advance of her friend, and never turned her head nor spoke, until the door of her *boudoir* had shut them in; then she turned and faced her companion, uttering as she did so a low mirthless laugh.

"Well!" she asked abruptly, "how do you like him?"

Constance bent a searching gaze upon her friend, and read her state of mind with a woman's keen intuition. The tensely-strung nerves, the dread of this interview, the determination to have it over, and to bear her part bravely; a proud and stubborn nature, battling with despair and unspeakable heartache. She understood it all, and her own heart bled for her friend. But, being a wise little woman, she held her pity in reserve, and replied, as if the question concerned a new dancing-master:

"I don't like him at all, child; let's talk about something more interesting," and she threw herself down upon a *fauteil*, and tossed off her hat; just as she had tossed it aside a hundred times, in that same pretty room. The simple action brought a thrill of tenderness and sad recollection to the heart of Sybil. She seated herself beside her friend, and her face lost a shade of its bitterness.

"It's like the shadow of the old days, Con," she said, sadly, "and the substance I can never have any more. But, you must let me talk; I feel as if I must talk, and you will let me say what I will, and ask me nothing. Con., you saw that—that creature down stairs? You saw him, but you did not hear him."

She shuddered, and paused for an instant; but Constance did not speak, and so she continued:

"I had made up my mind never to speak of him to you, but the very thing I had dreaded

has happened; you have met, and, in the generosity of your soul, for my sake, you have extended to him your hand, have openly accepted his acquaintance. Oh, Con.! I could have struck him dead before he touched your hand. *He!* Ah, there is a limit to my forbearance; he has forced himself into my life to blight it! he has forced himself into my family to be an added curse. But he shall not force himself upon my friends. Con., treat him with the disdain he deserves, else he will force his way into your very drawing-room. Never, never, never, extend to him the courtesies due to an equal. He is not an equal, he is not a man at all; he is a fat, sleek, leering, ruminating animal, at his best; he is a wolf, a vampire, a devil, at other times; ignorant, vain, avaricious, gross. Rather than see him force himself upon you, as he has forced himself upon us here, I will myself sever our friendship, I will never see, never speak with you again. John Burrill shall find a limit which even his brute force cannot pass." She was growing more and more excited, and a bright spot burned on each cheek.

Constance was startled, but fully understanding the necessity for perfect coolness, now that Sybil's composure had almost given way, she never attempted to interrupt the words that were but the overflow of long pent up feelings, but sat quietly stroking one of Sybil's slender hands, and becoming more amazed and mystified as she listened,

"Sometimes I find myself wondering at the tenacity of my life," went on Sybil, more hurriedly and with increasing excitement. "Sometimes I feel my strength leaving me, and think the battle is almost over; but somehow it is renewed, and I find myself growing strong instead of weak. For months I lived with my inevitable fate constantly before my eyes. I knew that there was no escape; that what has transpired, must happen. I have suffered tortures, passed nights without sleep, and days without food. I have grown a little paler, a little thinner, and a great deal wickeder, and that is all. I am strong, as strong as in the beginning, and yet, what am I but a galvanised corpse? I am dead to all that is worth living for. My one wish is to be free, and yet, Con., do you know I have never once been tempted to self-destruction."

Constance Wardour sprang impetuously to her feet, and paced the length of the *boudoir* again and again in perfect silence. The terrible weight of torment that was crushing Sybil's heart, and maddening her brain, seemed to rest, too, upon her, and weigh down her spirits; she was tortured with the sight of Sybil's misery and the thought of her own helplessness. Could nothing be done? Struggling for an appearance of composure, she paced to and fro, and at last, having mastered her feelings, and arranged her thoughts, she resumed her seat beside Sybil, whose eyes had followed her movements with curiosity.

"Sybil, listen;" she began, with that clear, concise, energy of manner that, in itself, inspired confidence. "If you do not wish me to make any overtures of friendship, rest assured I shall make none. I, at least, am not under the spell which this man seems to have thrown about you all. There, don't draw back, child, I have no more to say on this part of the subject. I may ask a few questions, however, without treading on forbidden ground. You say John Burrill is avaricious; can he not be bought off?"

Sybil shook her head.

"Not with the Wardour estate," she replied sadly. "Not with all our fortunes united.

"Cannot he be frightened, then?"

"Frightened! You don't know what you are saying."

"Then, I can think of one other way. He is a bad man; he must have led a wicked life; can we not find something in his past, which will place him in our power? Can he not be driven into banishment through fear of justice?"

Sybil turned her eyes full upon her friend; eyes dark with the shadow of despair, but unwavering in their sad firmness.

"If that could be done," she said, slowly, "the very day that witnessed his downfall would bring about the catastrophe I have sacrificed myself to avert. Constance, say no more; we can do none of these things; there is no help for me on this side of the grave."

Constance looked once more at her friend; looked long and earnestly then.

"Sybil," she cried, with swift resolution. "Do you know what you are bringing upon yourself? Do you want to go mad, and so be at the mercy of John Burrill? It is what will come upon you if you don't throw off this torpor. Your eyes are as dry as if tears were not meant to relieve the overburdened heart. Let your tears flow; shake off this lethargy; battle royally for your life; it is worth more than his; do not let him put your reason to flight, and so conquer. Sybil! Sybil!"

The words ended in a sobbing cry, but Sybil only gazed dumbly, and then looked helplessly about her.

"There, there, Conny," she said at last, as if soothing a hurt child; "don't mind me. It's true my life is worth more than his, but—I can't cry, I don't *feel* like crying."

"Then laugh," cried Constance desperately; "laugh and defy your tormentor; harden your heart if you must, but don't let it break."

"I won't," said Sybil, with a quiet emphasis. "Now come and see my diamonds, Con."

She crossed the room as she spoke, bent over a dressing-case, and came back with a tray of sparkling, newly set jewels.

"Bah!" she said, as she dropped the glittering things one by one into her friend's lap. "How I loved their glitter once, and how I envied you your treasure of jewels; now you have lost your treasure, and I have no more love for mine."

Constance laughed oddly, as she bent to recover her hat from the floor, where it had lain during their interview.

"Secret for secret Sybil," she said, with forced gaiety. "I have one little secret of mine own, and I am inclined to tell it you, because I know you can appreciate it, and can keep it; and I choose to have it kept. Bend down your head, dear; walls may have ears. Listen."

Sybil bent her dark head, and Constance whispered a few short sentences that caused her to spring up erect and excited.

"Constance! you are not jesting?"

"Honestly no. I have told you the truth, plain and unvarnished."

Sybil stood as if transfixed with surprise, or some sudden inspiration.

"Why, how amazed you look, dear; after all it's an old, old trick, and easily played. Come, don't stare at me any longer; put away your diamonds and come below with me, my ponies must be dying with impatience, and I am anxious to avoid our mutual foe; for I make common cause with you, dear, and I have told you my secret, that we may be in very truth, fellow conspirators. Make my adieus to the family, and be sure and come to me just as you used; if your orge insists upon coming, trust me to freeze him into an earnest desire to be in a warmer and more congenial place. Courage, *mon ami*, somehow we must win the battle."

Sybil took the diamonds from her hands and put them away, with far more care than she had displayed in bringing them forth; then she followed her friend from the room, closing and carefully locking the door behind her.

Constance observed the unusual caution, but made no comment. Only when many days after she remembered that day she wondered how she could have been so stupidly blind.

She effected her departure without being seen by Frank or Burrill, and drove homeward, revolving in her mind various plots for the confusion of the latter, and plans for awakening Sybil from the dangerous melancholy that would surely unseat her reason.

"If I could only move her to tears," she murmured, "only break that frozen calm once. How can I touch, move, melt her? It must be done." And pondering this difficult task, she drove slowly on.

"I wonder if I blundered in telling her my secret," she mused. "I know she will keep it; and yet, somehow, I fear I was too hasty. One would think it had grown too big for me to keep. But, pshaw! it's not a life and death matter, and I wanted to give a new impulse to that poor child's thoughts. But I must try and cure myself of this impulsiveness, just as if it were not 'bred in the bone,' for it was an impulse that made me whisper my secret to Sybil; and once, it has got me into serious trouble!" And her brow darkened, as she thought of the feud thus raised between herself and Doctor Heath.

While she was thus pondering, Sybil Burrill had hurried back to her own room, locked herself in, and with hands clasped and working nervously, was pacing restlessly up and down, as Constance had done a little earlier.

"It's the only way," she muttered between shut teeth, "the only possible way." And then she unlocked the dressing case, took out her jewels once more, handling them with greatest care. She spread them out before her, and resting her elbows on the dressing-table, and her chin in the palm of one slender hand, gazed and thought with darkening brow and compressed lips, and with now and then a shudder, and a startled glance behind and about her.

"It's the only way," she repeated. "They have left me but one weapon, and it's *for my life*;" and the lips set themselves in hard lines, and the dark eyes looked steely and

resolute. What wild purpose was taking shape in the tortured brain of Sybil Burrill, planted there by the impulsive revelation of Constance Wardour?

While the lurid light yet shone from her eyes, there came a tap upon the door, and then Mrs. Lamotte's voice called:

"Sybil, are you there?"

"Yes, mamma."

Sybil gathered up the jewels once more, hastily, and putting them under lock and key, admitted her mother. Mrs. Lamotte was never a demonstrative parent. She glanced anxiously at her daughter, and the look upon the pale face did not escape her eye; but she made no comment, only saying:

"I heard Constance drive away, and thought I should find you alone. Do you feel equal to a drive, Sybil?"

Sybil hesitated, and then answered: "I think so mamma, if you wish to go out."

"I have some shopping to do, and—it's best for us to go out a little. Don't you think so?"

"It's best that we keep up appearances, certainly mamma; for what else do we exist? Shall we take the honourable Mr. Burrill?"

Mrs. Lamotte shrugged her shoulders. "By no means," she replied. "Mr. Burrill, if his feelings are too much hurt, shall drive with me to-morrow. It's an honour he has been thirsting for."

"He, has indeed, mamma; the creature is insatiable."

Mrs. Lamotte arose with one of her cold smiles.

"For the present let us ignore him, Sybil," she said. "Make an elaborate driving toilet: we want the admiration of W——, not its pity." And having thus uttered one article of her creed, Mrs. Lamotte swept away to prepare for the ordeal, for such that drive would be to those two proud women.

No one could have guessed it, however, when an hour later, the elegant barouche, drawn by two superb grays, rolled through the streets of W——. Two richly-dressed, handsome, high-bred, smiling women; that is what W—— saw, and all it saw; and light-hearted poverty looked and envied, little knowing the sorrow hidden underneath the silk and lace, and the misery that was masked in smiles.

Meantime John Burrill, left to his own devices, found time drag heavily. Frank had abandoned him, as soon as it became known that Constance was gone; and had abandoned himself to a fit of rage, when he became aware that his black mare was also gone. Mr. Lamotte had driven to town with his own light buggy; Sybil was gone, and Evan was gone; even his stately mother-in-law was beyond the reach of his obnoxious pleasantries.

He ordered up a bottle of wine, and drank it in the spirit of an ill used man. Always, in his perfectly sober moments, John Burrill felt oppressed with a sense of the difference existing between himself and the people among whom he had chosen to cast his lot.

Not that he recognised, or admitted, his inferiority; had he not demonstrated to the world, that he, John Burrill, sometime mill worker, and overseer, was a man of parts, a self-made man?

When he had quaffed a bottle of wine, he began to feel oppressed in a different way. He was overburdened with a sense of his own genius, and in a very amiable frame of mind, altogether. In this mood, he joined the family at dinner; after which meal, a few glasses of brandy added fire to the smouldering element within him, and straightway he blazed forth, a gallant, a coxcomb. In this mind, he always admired himself excessively, took stock of his burly legs and brawny shoulders, and smiled sentimentally before the mirror, at his reflected face.

There were people who called John Burrill a handsome man; and if one had a fancy for a round head, with depressions where bumps are desirable, and *vice versa*, and an animal sort of attractiveness of feature, consisting of a low, flat forehead, straight nose, large, full red-lipped mouth, fair florid complexion, set off by a pair of dark blue eyes that were devoid of any kindly expression, and hair, full beard, and moustache, of a reddish brown hue, coarse in quality, but plentiful in quantity, and curling closely, then we will admit that John Burrill was handsome. Why not? We can see handsome bovines at any fat cattle show.

After this elation, came the fourth stage; a mixture of liquors as the evening advanced, and then John Burrill became jealous of his rights, careful of his dignity, crafty, quarrelsome, and difficult to manage. Next he became uproarious, then maudlin; then blind, beastly drunk, utterly regardless where he laid him down, or fell down, to finish the night, for his last stage usually dragged itself far into the small hours.

Gluttonous and meditative in the morning; beginning to swell with a growing sense of

importance about midday; amorous, obtrusive, and consequential later; hilarious after dinner; quarrelsome before tea; and down in the ditch before dawn. This was Burrill's notion of enjoying life in a leisurely, gentlemanly fashion. And this was his daily routine, with variations to suit the occasion.

But sober or drunk, morning, noon, or night, he never ceased to remind the Lamottes that he was one of them, their equal; never forgot his purpose, or allowed them to forget it, or him. He was their old man of the sea, their blight, their curse, and, they could never hope to shake him off.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN OPEN MUTINY.

SYBIL sat alone in her boudoir. It was yet early in the evening, but, feeling little inclined to remain in the society of her family, who assembled, with all due formality, in the drawing-room on "at home" evenings—and most of their evenings were spent at home now—she had withdrawn, pleading fatigue after their drive.

The night outside was balmy enough, but Sybil had ordered a light fire in the grate, and she sat before it with all the rays from a fully illuminated chandelier falling directly over her.

She still wore the rich dress she had put on for her drive; and excitement, exercise, *something*, had lent an unusual glow to her cheeks, and caused her dusky eyes to shine clear and steady. Almost too clear, too steadfast, was their gaze as it was fixed upon the glowing coals; she had not looked so thoughtful, so self-forgetful, yet self-absorbed, since she came back to Mapleton, John Burrill's wife.

Sitting thus, she heard a shambling step in the hall, and the heavy voice of her husband trolling out a snatch of song, caught up most likely in some bar-room.

He was approaching her door, and quick as thought, she sprang from her chair, and noiselessly examined the fastenings, to assure herself against him. Then, while her hand still rested on the door, his hand struck a huge blow upon the outside, and he called out gruffly:

"Sybil!"

No answer; she dared not move, lest the rustle of her silks should betray her. "S-Sybil, I say, lemme in." Still no reply, and John Burrill shook the door violently, and ground out an oath.

Just then came the sound of another door further up the hall, her mother's door. It opened easily, and closed softly, and then quick, cat-like steps approached, and the voice of Jasper Lamotte, low and serene as usual, arrested the noise of the baffled applicant for admittance.

"Less noise, Burrill." Sybil had not heard her father address him in that tone of familiar command. "Sybil's not there."

"Jes zif I didn't know better."

"Nonsense, man; your wife is below with her mother at this moment. Now stop that fuss, and shake yourself out. I've some private words for your ear."

"Oh!" the man's voice dropped a tone lower; "quite a time since we've 'ad many private words. 'Bout Sybil?"

"No, sir." The tone was lower than before, and so stern that it caused the listener to start. "Its about *your* business and *mine*."

"Oh! maybe you want to settle up and discharge me. Maybe you don't need me any more."

"Curse you for a fool! You know your own value too well. Bully as you please, where the rest are concerned, but drop your airs with me. Settle with Sybil later, if you must; I want you now."

Could it be Jasper Lamotte that uttered these words; rather, hissed them? Sybil almost betrayed herself in her surprise; but the gasp that she could not quite stifle, was drowned by the voice of Burrill, saying:

"All right. I'll settle with Sybil later."

And then she heard them enter her mother's room, and close the door softly.

For a full moment Sybil Burrill stood transfixed; then the silken folds that she had instinctively gathered about her at the first, slowly slipped from her hand; gradually the colour that had fled from her cheeks came back, and burned brighter than before. She seemed to control herself by a strong effort, and stood thinking—thinking.

Only for a few moments; then she lifted her head with a gesture of defiance: Swiftly and noiselessly she moved under the chandelier, drew it down, and extinguished every light. Then softly, cautiously, she opened her door and looked out, listened thus a moment, and then stepped boldly out, and, gliding to the head of the stairs, leaned down and listened.

From the drawing-room there came to her ear the sound of the piano, lightly touched, and Frank's tenor humming over the bars of a Neapolitan boat song.

Then she understood her father's mistake. Some unwonted impulse had caused her mother to seat herself at the piano and accompany Frank, who did not reckon piano-playing among his accomplishments; and the thing was so unusual that Sybil was not surprised at her parent's mistake.

Evan being absent, Jasper Lamotte naturally supposed that floor deserted, and therefore had not observed too much caution.

Only a moment did Sybil listen, and then gathering up the silken train, and crushing it into a soft mass under her hand, she crept noiselessly as a cat to the door of her mother's room, bent down her head, and listened there.

Five minutes, ten, and still they talked, and still Sybil stood, moveless and intent. Then drawing back suddenly she ran hurriedly down the hall, and had gained the foot of the stairs before the sound of the opening door admonished her that she had escaped none too soon.

In a moment she had entered the drawing-room, and, with more of her olden gaiety than they had seen in her manner for many long days, approached the loiterers at the piano.

"Mother, mother, your hand is out of time!" and, in a moment she had drawn her astonished mother from the stool and seated herself in the vacant place.

"Sing, Frank," she commanded, striking the keys with a crash that died away in discord. "We have been dull too long."

When Jasper Lamotte and his model son-in-law entered the drawing-room, they found Frank singing, Sybil accompanying him with dextrous fingers, and Mrs. Lamotte half resting near them, with veiled eyes, and her serenest cast of countenance.

Casting one keen glance toward Burrill, which, being interpreted, meant, "I told you so, you fool," Mr. Lamotte seated himself beside his wife.

John Burrill, during his interview with his father-in-law, had become a shade more reasonable, and less inclined to think that, in order to vindicate his wounded sensibilities, he must "have it out with Sybil." But his face still wore a surly look, and Frank, who was not over delicate in such matters, looked askance at him, and then whispered to Sybil, under cover of a softly-played interlude, that he "scented battle afar off."

Sybil's only answer was a low, meaning laugh, and when he had finished his song, she played on and on. *Sonata, bravura, fantasia, rondo;* a crash and whirl—rapid, swift, sweet, brilliant, cold; no feeling, no pathos. A fanciful person might have traced something of exultation and defiance in those dashing, rippling, waves of music.

Presently she stopped and turned to Frank.

"What shall you do in the morning?" she asked, abruptly.

Frank ran his fingers through his hair, after a fashion he much affected, and replied, slowly:

"Well, really. Nothing important. Going to ride to the office—meaning Heath's office, not the mills. Can I do anything for you, sis?"

"I was thinking," began Sybil, as unconcernedly as if she did not know that she was about to astonish, more than she had already done, every one of her listeners, "that it would be a fine morning for a canter; that is, if to-morrow should be a counterpart of to-day; and I am hungry to be in the saddle."

Frank roused himself from his lazy position, and looked interested. He took a secret delight in annoying Burrill, when he could do it without too much openness or display of *malice prepense;* and here was one of his opportunities.

"Well, Sybil, you shan't be hungering in vain," he replied, gallantly. "Name your hour, and your steed, and I will even sacrifice my last best morning nap, if need be."

Sybil laughed lightly.

"We will have a moderately seasonable breakfast, Frank, not to make your sacrifice too great; and I will ride Gretchen. Poor thing, she will have almost forgotten me now."

"Then that is settled," replied Frank, tranquilly, and glancing furtively toward Burrill, who was beginning to wriggle uneasily in his chair. "Do you want to go anywhere in particular, sis?"

"No, unless you leave me for awhile at Wardour Place; I want to see some of Con.'s new dresses. You can ride into town and call for me later."

"Ah! very nice arrangement; then *I* can't call with you?"

"Decidedly not, sir. Who wants a man always about? They are conveniences, not blessings."

"Oh, well, I'm extinguished. I promise to vanish from your gaze as soon as you are within the gates of the Princess of Wardour. And now I think, after so much vocal effort, and so much self-humiliation, I will go and smoke. Adieu, sister mine; adieu mamma. Will you smoke, Burrill?"

"No sir, thank you;" replied Burrill, with brief courtesy, and Frank, who knew beforehand what his answer would be, went toward his own room, smiling contentedly.

"I wonder what's up with Sybil?" he said to himself. "She has waked up decidedly; but she has let herself in for a rumpus with Burrill."

When he had gone Sybil arose, and seating herself near her mother, said:

"Mamma, you were saying something about going to the city yesterday; have you decided about it?"

Mrs. Lamotte, who had had no thought of going to the city, and who was fully conscious that she had made no remarks on the subject, looked up without a ruffle upon her placid countenance and replied, like a wise and good mother:

"No, my child, I have not decided."

"Then when you decide to go, inform me beforehand, mamma. I think I should like to accompany you and do some shopping for myself."

Here Burrill showed such marked symptoms of outbreak that Mr. Lamotte who, throughout the hour they had passed in the drawing-room, had been a quiet but close observer, though it wise to interpose, and artfully attempt to avert the impending storm by saying:

"Now that sounds natural. I'm glad that you feel like shopping, Sybil, and like getting out more. Very glad, aren't you, Burrill?"

But Mr. Burrill had no notion of being thus appeased; instead of spiking a gun Jasper Lamotte had opened a battery.

"I'm delighted to hear that Mrs. Burrill has stopped moping," he said gruffly; "but I'll be hanged if I'm glad to hear myself left out of all the programmes, and I'll be cussed if I'm going to put up with it, either;" and Mr. Burrill, being full in more senses than one, arose and paced the room with more fierceness than regularity.

Mr. Lamotte forgot himself so far as to utter an angry imprecation between his shut teeth, and to wrinkle his forehead into a dark frown. Mrs. Lamotte allowed a shade of contempt to creep about her lips as she turned her eyes upon her daughter, but Sybil looked not one whit disconcerted.

"I've got something to say about my wife," went on Mr. Burrill, "and I'm blessed if I don't say it."

What had come over Sybil? Heretofore she would in any way, in every way, have avoided an encounter with him; she would have quitted the field or have remained deaf as a post; but now, "Say it, then, Mr. Burrill, say it, by all means, here and now," she retorted in the coolest voice imaginable.

And Mr. Burrill did say it.

"I've have had enough of being made a fool of, Mrs. Sybil Burrill; I've had enough of being a carpet under your feet, and nothing better. I'm your equal, and anybody's equal, that's what *I* am, and I'm going to have *my* rights. It's very well for you to announce that you're going here and going there, Mrs. Burrill; but let me tell you that you go *nowhere* except John Burrill goes with you, that's settled."

Sybil laughed scornfully.

"Not quite so fast, Mr. Burril; just stand still one moment, if you *can* stand still, which I doubt. You say you will accompany me wherever I go; I say you may accompany me wherever people will tolerate you, nowhere else. You are not the man to force into a gentleman's parlour; you would disgrace his kitchen, his stable. The streets are free to all, you can accompany me in my drives; the churches are open to the vilest, you can go with me there; but into the houses of my friends you *shall not* go; I will not so abuse friendship. You have counted upon me to gain you *entrée* to Wardour and to a dozen houses, the thresholds of which you will never cross. If you are not satisfied with this, then you must be suited with less. I will not be seen with you at all."

Again Jasper Lamotte, vexed and alarmed for the *denouement*, interposed, knowing she was striking at Burrill's chief weakness:

"But Sybil, Miss Wardour, here in her meetings with Burrill, tacitly recognised his right to call."

She turned upon him swiftly.

"You know why she did it, sir; it is useless to discuss the question. You may calm Mr. Burrill in any way you please, or can. You know the terms on which he became my husband. He will continue my husband on my own terms. He shall not cross the threshold

of Wardour, protected by my presence, and without it the doors will close in his face. If Mr. Burrill does not like my terms, let him say so. *It is not in his power or yours to alter my decision.*" And Sybil once more gathered together her silken skirts, lest in passing they should brush the now collapsed Mr. Burrill, and swept from the room.

Mr. Lamotte turned to his wife.

"You must talk with the girl," he said, savagely. "What the devil ails you all?"

Mrs. Lamotte rose and faced him.

"I should be wasting my breath," she replied, looking him straight in the eye. "You have tried that girl a little too far, Mr. Lamotte," and she followed after her daughter.

A roar, not unlike the bellow of a bull, recalled Mr. Lamotte to the business of the moment. John Burrill, having recovered from his momentary stupor of astonishment, was dancing an improvised and unsteady *can-can* among the chairs and tables, beating the air with his huge fists, and howling with rage.

Seeing this, Mr. Lamotte did first, a very natural thing; he uttered a string of oaths, "not loud, but deep," and next, a very sensible thing; he rang for brandy and hot water.

And now the battle is in Mr. Lamotte's hands, why need we linger. Brandy hot will always conquer a John Burrill.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PLAY GOES ON.

WHEN Sybil Burrill, after uttering her defiance in the face of father and husband, had swept from the room, closely followed by her mother, another form moved away from the immediate vicinity of the most accessible drawing-room window—the form of Evan Lamotte. Crouching, creeping, shivering, cursing, he made his way to the spot where he had left Frank's horse, and led it toward the stables.

Anything but sober when he commenced his vigil underneath the drawing-room windows, he had been shocked into sobriety by his sister's violence, and his own rage against her tormentors. Growing more and more sober, and more and more sullen, he stabled the ill-used thoroughbred with his own hands, and then, avoiding alike both servants and family, he crept into the house, and up to his own room.

In the morning he awoke betimes, and arose promptly. He had come to know the habits of his father and John Burrill, and he had good reason for knowing them, having of late made their movements his study.

Burrill would sleep until nine o'clock; he always did after a debauch, and he, Evan, had recently formed a habit of appearing late at breakfast also. From his room he kept up a surveillance over all the household after a method invented by himself.

He knew when his stately mother swept down to the breakfast room, followed soon after by his father.

The family all aimed to breakfast before the obnoxious Burrill had come to his waking time, and so were rid of him for one meal, all but Evan. He and his brother-in-law breakfasted together later, and in the most amiable manner. After a time he heard Frank go down, and the ring of his heels assured Evan that he was equipped for the saddle.

A little later, and, from his post at his front window screened by the flowing curtains, Evan saw the horses led around, saw Sybil come down the steps in her trailing, dark cloth habit, saw her spring lightly to the saddle, and heard a mocking laugh ring out, in response to some sally from Frank, as they cantered away.

"Act one in the insurrection," said Evan, as he turned away from the window. "Now let *me* prepare for action." His preparations were few and simple; he removed his boots and coat, and crept out, and softly along the hall until he reached Burrill's door. Here he paused, to assure himself that he was not observed, and then softly tried the door; as he had expected, it opened without resistance for Burrill had been escorted to bed, by his faithful father-in-law, in a state of mellowness, that precluded all thought of the night, or the dangers it might bring forth. Evan entered, cautiously closing the door as he had found it, and approaching the bed. Its occupant was sleeping heavily, and breathing melodiously. Satisfied on this point, Evan opened a commodious wardrobe near the bed, threw down some clothing, spread it out smoothly, and then stepping within, he drew the doors together, fastening them by a hook of his own contrivance, on the inside; for Evan had made this wardrobe do service before. Then he laid himself down as comfortably as possible, and applied his eye to some small holes pune-

tured in the dark wood, and quite invisible to casual outside observation.

He had began to grow restless in his hiding-place, and fiercely disgusted with the sleeper's monotonously musical whistle, when his waiting was rewarded. The door once again opened cautiously, and this time, Jasper Lamotte entered. He looked carefully about him, then closing and locking the door, he approached the sleeper.

"I knew it," thought Evan; "the fox will catch the wolf napping, and nail him before he can fortify himself with a morning dram."

It took some time to arouse the sleeper, but Jasper Lamotte was equal to the occasion; this not being his first morning interview with his son-in-law; and, after a little, John Burrill was sufficiently awake to scramble through with a hasty toilet, talking as he dressed.

"Business is getting urgent," he grumbled, thrusting a huge foot into a gorgeously decorated slipper. "I'd rather talk after breakfast."

"Pshaw, you are always drunk enough to be unreasonable before noon. Turn some cold water upon your head and be ready to attend to what I have to say."

What he had to say took a long time in the telling, for it was a long, long hour before the conference broke up, and the two men left the room together.

Then the doors of the wardrobe opened slowly and a pale, pinched face looked forth; following the face came the body of Evan Lamotte, shaken as if with an ague. Mechanically he closed the wardrobe, and staggered rather than walked from the room. Once more within his own room, he locked the door with an unsteady hand, and then threw himself headlong upon the bed, uttering groan after groan, as if in pain.

After a time he arose from the bed, still looking as if he had seen a ghost, and, going to a desk, opened it, and took therefrom a capacious drinking flask. Raising it to his lips he drained half its contents, and the stimulant acting upon overstrained nerves, seemed to restore rather than to intoxicate.

"At last," he muttered to himself, "I am at the bottom of the mystery, and—I am powerless." Then, like his sister on the previous day, he muttered, "There is but one way—only one—and *it must be done!*" Then throwing himself once more upon the bed, he moaned: "Oh, that I, the accursed of the family, heretofore, should live to be— But pshaw! it is for Sybil I care. But—for to-day let them all keep out of my sight—I could not see them and hold my peace."

He pocketed the half empty flask, and made his way from the house, to be seen by none at Mapleton for the next twenty-four hours.

After that morning interview with his father-in-law, John Burrill blusters less for a few days, and makes himself less disagreeable to the ladies. He accepts the situation, or seems to; he rides out on one or two sunny afternoons with Mrs. Lamotte and Sybil, and on one of these occasions they meet Constance Wardour driving with her aunt. The heiress of Wardour smiles gaily and kisses the tips of her fingers to the ladies, but there is no chance for him—he might be the footman for all Constance seems to see or know to the contrary. This happens in a thoroughfare where they are more than likely to have been observed, and John Burrill chafes inwardly, and begins to ponder how he can, in the face of all the Lamottes, gain a recognition from Constance Wardour. In his sober moments this becomes a haunting thought; in his tipsy ones it grows to be a mania.

One day, during this lull in the family siege, Sybil and her mother visit the city, doing a mountain of shopping, and returning the next day. Sybil keeps on as she began, on the night when she listened to her father and husband, while they held council in her mother's room. She is full of energy and nervous excitement always, and the old stupor of dullness, and apathetic killing of time, never once returns. But Mrs. Lamotte likes this last state not much better than the first; neither does Constance; but they say nothing, for the reason that it would be useless, as they know too well. Sybil goes out oftener, sits with the family more, and seems like one waiting anxiously for a long-expected event.

John Burrill is a little disturbed at Sybil's visit to the city. He knows that she will go and come as she pleases there, unquestioned, and, if she choose, unattended by her mother. And, without knowing why, he feels inclined to rebel; but he is still under the spell of that morning interview, and so holds his peace.

Evan, too, under the same uncanny spell, goes about more morose than usual, more silent than usual, more sarcastic than usual. More and more, too, he attaches himself to John Burrill; they drink together in the dining-room, and then repair together to

"Old Forty Rods," or some other favourite haunt. Together they seek for pleasure in the haunts of the vilest, Evan continually playing upon the vanity and credulity in Burrill's nature, to push him forward as the leader in all their debauches, the master spirit, the *bon vivant, par excellence.*

And Burrill goes on and on, down and down. He begins to confide all his maudlin woes to Evan, and that young man is ever ready with sympathy and advice that is not calculated to make Jasper Lamotte's position, as bear trainer, a sinecure.

But Evan contrives to leave Sybil tolerably free from this nuisance for a time; but only for a time. John Burrill has other advisers, other exhorters, other spurs that edge him on to his own downfall.

Burrill begins to throw himself in the way of Constance Wardour; to meet her carriage here and there; to stand near by as she goes and comes on her shopping excursions; to drive past Wardour Place alone and often.

At first, this only amuses Miss Wardour; then it annoys her; then, when she finds her walks in the grounds so often overlooked by the slowly passing Burrill, she begins to mark his manœuvres with a growing vexation.

But Burrill perseveres, and the more nearly he approaches the fourth stage of his intoxication, the more open becomes his stare, the more patent his growing admiration.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN BURRILL, PLEBEIAN.

It is night, late and lowering; especially gloomy in the quarter of W—— where loom the great ugly rows of tenements that are inhabited by the factory toilers; for the gloom and smoke of the great engines brood over the roofs night and day, and the dust and cinders could only be made noticeable by their absence.

In a small cottage, at the end of a row of larger houses, a woman is busy clearing away the fragments of a none too bountiful supper. A small woman, with a sour visage, and not one ounce of flesh on her person, that is not absolutely needed to screen from mortal gaze a bone. A woman with a long, sharp nose, two bright ferret-like brown eyes, and a rasping voice, that seems to have worn itself thin asking hard questions of Providence, from sunrise till dark.

The table has been spread for two, but the second party at the banquet, a gamin son aged seven, has swallowed his own and all he could get of his mother's share, and betaken himself to the streets, night though it be.

The woman moves about, now and then muttering to herself as she works. The room is shabbily furnished, and not over neat, for its mistress spends her days in the great mill hard by, and housekeeping has become a secondary matter. Only the needs of life find their demands honoured in this part of W——. Too often needs get choked and die of the smoke and the cinders.

It is late, for the woman has been doing extra work; it is stormy, too, blustering and spattering rain. Yet she pauses occasionally and listens to a passing footfall, as though she expected a visitor.

At last, when the final touch has made the room as tidy as it ever is, or as she thinks it need be, there comes a shuffling of feet outside, and a tremendous thump on the rickety door. After which, as if he was sufficiently heralded, in comes a man, a big man, muffled to the eyes in a huge coat, which he slowly draws down and draws off, disclosing to the half curious, half contemptuous gaze of the woman the auburn locks and highly tinted countenance of Mr. John Burrill.

"So," she says, in her shrillest voice, "it's *you*, is it? It seems one is never to be rid of you at any price."

"Yes, it's me—all of me," the man replies, as if confirming a doubtful statement. "Why, now; you act as if you didn't expect me."

"And no more I did," says the woman sullenly and most untruthfully. "It's a wonder to me that you can't stay away from here, after all that's come and gone."

"Well, I can't," he retorts, amiably rubbing his hands together. "Anyhow, I won't, which means about the same thing. Where's the little duffer?"

"He's where you were at his age, I expect," she replies grimly.

"Well, and if he only keeps on as I have, until he gets up to my present age, he won't be in a bad boat, eh, Mrs. Burrill the first."

"He's got too much of his mother's grit to be where *you* are, John Burrill, livin' a lackey among people that despise you because you have got a hand on 'em somewhere. I want to know if you don't think they will choke you off some day when they are done using you?"

John Burrill seated himself astride a low wooden chair, propelling it and himself forward by a movement of the feet and a "hitch" of the shoulders, he leaned across the chair-back in his most facetious manner, and addressed her with severe eloquence.

"Look here, Mrs. Burrill, number one, don't you take advantage of your position, and ride the high horse too free. It's something to 'ave been Mrs. J. Burrill once, I'll admit; but don't let it elevate you too much. You ain't quite so handsome as the present Mrs. Burrill, neither are you so young, consequently you don't show off so well in a tantrum. Now the present Mrs. Burrill—"

"Oh, then she does have tantrums, the present Mrs. Burrill," sneered the woman, fairly quivering with suppressed rage. "One would think she would be so proud of you that she could excuse all your little faults. Brooks says that they all talk French up there, so that you can't wring into their confabs, John."

"Does he?" remarked Burrill, quietly, but with an ominous gleam in his ugly eyes. "Brooks must be careful of that tongue of his. You may reckon that they all stop their French when *I* begin to talk. Now don't be disagreeable, Nance; it ain't every man that can take a rise in the world like me, and *I* don't put on airs, and hold myself above my old friends. Do you think that every man could step into such a family as *I* belong to, Mrs. Burrill? No one can say that John Burrill's a common fellow after that feat."

"No, but a great many can say that John Burrill's a mean fellow, too mean to walk over. Do you think the men as you worked along side of, and drank and supped with, don't know what you are, John Burrill! Do you think that they don't all know that your outrageous vanity has made a fool of you! Chance threw into your hands a secret of the Lamottes; you need not stare, we ain't fools down here at the factories. Maybe I know what that secret is, and maybe I don't. It's no matter. I know more of your doings than you give me credit for, John Burrill. Now, what must you do? Blackmail would have satisfied a sensible man; but straightway you are seized with the idea that you were born to be a gentleman. You! Then you form your plan; and you force, by means of the power in your hands, that beautiful young lady to marry you."

"Seems to me," interrupts the man, who has been listening quite contentedly, "that you are getting along too fast with your story."

"Yes, I am too fast. When you first hatched out this plan, you came to me and put a pistol to my head, and swore that if I didn't apply for a divorce from you at once, you would blow my brains out. I had swore more than once to have a divorce; and Lord knows I had cause enough; what with the drunkenness and the beatings, and the idleness, and the night prowlin', and all the rest; but I never expected that."

The woman paused for a moment, and then resumed her triade of mixed eloquence and bad grammar.

"I didn't expect to be drove into the divorce court at the point of a pistol, but that's how it ended, and you was free to torment Miss Lamotte, poor young thing! Don't you let yourself think that I envied *her!* Lord knows I had had enough of you, and your meanness, but I pitied her; and if I had knocked out your brains, as I've been tempted to do a dozen times, when you have rolled in here blind drunk, I'd have done her a good turn, and myself too. The time was when Nance Fergus was your equal, and more too; but you left England with the notion that here you would be the equal of anybody, and you've never got clear of the idea. I've tried to make you understand that there's a coarse breed of folks, same's there is of dogs, and that you are of a mighty coarse breed. I've lived out with gentlefolks over the water, and they were none of your sort. But, go on John Burrill, the low women you are so fond of, and the girls at the factory, have called you good lookin', until your head is turned with vanity. You have got yourself in among the upper class, no matter how, and I suppose you expect your good looks to do the rest for you. I mind once when I was at service in Herefordshire, the Squire had a fine young beast in his cattle yard, black an' sleek, an' handsome to look at, and the young ladies came down from the big house and looked at it through the fence, and called it a 'beautiful creature,' but all the same they led it away to the slaughter-house with a ring in its nose, and the young ladies dined off it with a relish."

John Burrill stroked his nasal organ fondly, as if discerning some connection between that protuberance and the aforementioned ring; but he made no attempt to interrupt her.

"You was bad enough in England, John

Burrill; what with your poaching and your other misdeeds, and sorry was the day when I left a good place to come away from the country with you, because it was gettin' too hot for you to stay there. You couldn't get along without me then; and you can't get along now it seems, for all your fine feathers, without you come here sometimes to brag of your exploits, and pretend you are lookin' after the boy."

"Nance," said Burrill, "you're a fine old bird! 'Ow I'd like to set you at my old father-in-law, blarst him, when he rides it too rough sometimes, and, what a sociable little discourse you could lay down for the ladies, too, Nance; but, are you about done? You've been clean over the old ground, seems to me, tho' I may have dozed a little here and there. Have you been over the old business, and brought me over the water, by the nape of the neck; because, if you havn't—no, I see you have not, so here's to you, Nance, spin on;" and he took from his pocket a black bottle, and drank a mighty draught therefrom.

"No, I'm *not* done," screamed the woman. "You've come here to-night, as you have before, for a purpose. One would think that such a fine gentleman could find better society, but it seems you can't. You never come here for nothing; you never come for any good; you want something. What is it?

He laughed a low, hard laugh.

"Yes," he said, taking another pull at the black bottle; "I want something."

"Umph! I thought so."

"I want to tell you," here he arose, and dropping his careless manner, laid a threatening hand upon her arm. I want to tell you, Nance Burrill, that you have got to bridle that tongue of yours; d'ye understand?"

She shook off his hand, and retired a few paces, eyeing him closely as she said:

"Oh! I thought so. Something has scared ye already."

"No, I'm not scared; that thing can't be done by you, Nance; but you have been blowing too much among the factory people, and I won't have it."

"Won't have what?"

"Won't have any more of this talk about going to my wife with stories about me."

"Who said I threatened?"

"No matter; you don't do much that I don't hear of, so mind your eye, Nance. As for the women at the bend, you let them alone, and keep your tongue between your teeth."

"Oh! I will; one can't blame you for seeking the society of your equals, after the snubbing you must get from your betters up there. But that don't satisfy you; you must drag that poor fellow, Evan Lamotte, into their den; as if he were not wild enough, before you came where you could reach him."

John Burrill took another pull at the black bottle.

"Evan's a good fellow," he said somewhat thickly. "He knows enough to appreciate a man like me, and we both have larks now, let me tell you."

"Well, have your larks; but don't sit and drink yourself blind before my very eyes. Why don't you go?"

"Cause I don't want'er—," growing more and more mellow, as the liquor went fuming to his head, already pretty heavily loaded with brandy and wine. "Where's the little rooster, I tell yer?"

"In the streets, and he's too much like his father to ever come home, 'till he's gone after, and dragged in."

"Well, go and drag him in then; I'm goin' ter see 'im."

"I won't!" shrieked the woman, now fairly beside herself with rage. Go home to your lady wife, and take her my compliments; tell her that I turned you out."

John Burrill staggered to his feet, uttering a brutal oath. "You'll turn me out, will you! You say *won't* to me! You are forgetting my training, Mrs. Nance; I'll teach you that John Burrill's yer master yet. Go for the boy."

But the woman did not stir.

"You won't, eh!" clutching her fiercely, and shaking her violently; "now will you?"

"No, you brute."

"Then, take that, and that, and that!"

A rain of swift blows; a shriek ringing out on the stillness of the night; then a swift step, the door dashed in, and John Burrill is measuring his length upon the bare floor.

The woman reels, as the clutch of the miscreant loosens from her arm, but recovers herself and turns a bruised face toward the timely intruder. It is Clifford Heath.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asks, anxiously.

She lifts a hand to her poor bruised face and aching head, and then, sinking into a chair, says, wearily:

"It's nothing—for me. Look out, sir!"

This last was an exclamation of warning. John Burrill had staggered to his feet, and

was aiming an unsteady blow at the averted head of Doctor Heath.

The latter turned swiftly, comprehending the situation at a glance, and once more felled the brute to the floor.

By this time others had appeared upon the scene—neighbours, roused by the cry of the woman.

Doctor Heath bent again to examine her face. He had scarcely observed the features of the man he had just knocked down; and he now asked:

"Is—this man your husband, madam?"

The woman reddened under her bruises.

"He *was* my husband," she said bitterly. "He is—John Burrill."

Clifford Heath started back, thinking, first of all, of Sybil, and realizing that there must be no scandal, that could be avoided, for her sake. He had never seen Burrill, save at a distance, but had heard, as had everyone in W——, of his divorced wife.

Turning to one of the neighbours, he said: "I was passing on my way home from Mrs. Brown's, when I heard this alarm. I think, good people, that we had better let this fellow go away quietly, and attend to this woman. Her face will be badly swollen by and by." Then he turned once more toward Burrill.

Once more the miscreant was struggling to his feet, and at a command from Doctor Heath, he hastened his efforts. Hitherto, he had had only a vision of a pair of flashing dark eyes, and an arm that shot out swiftly, and straight home.

Now, however, as he gained an erect posture, and turned a threatening look upon his assailant, the onlookers, who all knew him, and all hated and feared him, saw a sudden and surprising transformation. The red all died out of his face, the eyes seemed starting from their sockets, the lower jaw dropped abjectly and suddenly, and, with a yell of terror, John Burrill lowered his head and dashed from the house, as if pursued by a legion of spectres

CHAPTER XIX.

NANCE BURRILL'S WARNING.

THE sudden and surprising exit of Burrill caused, for a moment, a stay of proceedings, and left the group, so rapidly gathered in Nance Burrill's kitchen, standing *en tableaux*, for a full minute.

Dr. Heath was the first to recover from his surprise, and as he took in the absurdity of the scene, he uttered a low laugh, and turned once more toward the woman, Nance, who seemed to have lost herself in a prolonged stare.

"Your persecutor does not like my looks, apparently," he said, at the same time taking from his pocket a small medicine case. "Or was it some of these good friends that put him to flight?" And he glanced at the group gathered near the door.

A woman with a child in her arms, and her husband with two more in change, at her heels; a family group to the rescue; two or three old women, of course; and a man with a slouching gait, a shock of unruly red hair, and a face very much freckled across the cheek-bones, and very red about the nose; the eyes, too, had an uncanny squint, as if nature had given up her task too soon and left him to survey the world through the narrow slits. This man had always an air of being profoundly interested in the smallest affairs of life, perhaps, because the slits through which he gazed magnified the objects gazed upon, and he peered about him now with profoundest solicitude. This was Watt Brooks, a mechanic, and hanger-on about the mills, where he did an occasional bit of odd work, and employed the balance of his time in gossiping among the women, or lounging at the drinking saloons, talking a great deal about the wrongs of the working classes, and winning to himself some friends from a certain turbulent class who listened admiringly to his loud, communistic oratory.

Brooks had not been long in W——, but he had made rapid headway among that class who, having little or nothing to love or to fear, are not slow to relieve the monotony of a very bare existence by appropriating to themselves the friendship of every hail fellow whom chance throws in their way.

Accordingly Brooks had become a sort of oracle among the dwellers in "Mill avenue," as the street was facetiously called, and he was ready for any dish of gossip, not infrequently making himself conspicuous as a teller of news; he was faithful in gathering up and retailing small items among such ladies of the "avenue" as, being exempted from mill-work because of family cares, had time and inclination—and this latter was seldom lacking—to chatter with him about the latest mishap, or the one that was bound to occur soon.

Prominent among the gossips of Mill

Avenue was that much abused matron, Mrs. John Burrill number one, and she had not been slow to discover the advantages of possessing such an acquaintance as Mr. Brooks; accordingly they gravitated toward each other by mutual attraction, and it was quite a common thing for Brooks to drop in and pass an evening hour in the society of Mrs. Burrill, sometimes even taking a cup of tea at the table of the lone woman on a Sunday afternoon.

As Doctor Heath laid his case upon the small pine table, and prepared to deal out a soothing lotion for the bruised Mrs. Burrill, Brooks advanced courageously, supported on either hand by an anxious old lady, and the chorus commenced.

"It warn't *us* as scared him out, sir," said Brooks, positively. "He's seen all o' us, first and last. Maybe as he's had cause for remembering *you*, sir?" and Brooks peered anxiously at the doctor, as if hoping for a prompt confirmation of this shrewd guess.

"Sure, an' it was a guilty conscience, if ever I seen one, as made the brute beast run like that, from the sight of the doctor," chimed in the first old lady, who quarrelled with her "old man" on principle, and seldom came out second best. "Faith, an' the murtherin' wretch has half killed ye, Burrill, dear."

"I was that scart with the screamin'," said the mother of three, "that I nearly let the baby fall a runnin' here."

And then they all gathered around Mrs. Burrill, and talked vigorously, and all together, while Brooks, hovering near the doctor, pursued his investigation.

"A bad lot, that Burrill, sir. I've seen him, frequent. And so he's had occasion to know you, sir?"

"No, my good fellow; I never had the honour of meeting Mr. John Burrill before," replied Doctor Heath, smiling at the man's pertinacity.

"Now, I want to know," exclaimed Brooks, in accents of real distress, "then what *could* have set him off like that?"

"I suppose we were getting too many for him," replied the doctor, easily.

"Not a bit of it, sir. Burrill ain't no coward, especially when he's in liquor; and he and me's on good enough terms, too; though, of course," said Brooks, recollecting himself, and glancing anxiously at the reclining figure of the injured one, "of course, I would never stand by and see a lady struck down, sir."

"Manifestly not," replied the doctor, drily. "Then, as he would not fear you, and could not fear me, he must have been in the first stages of 'snake seeing.'"

"Its my opinion, he took you for somebody else, as he has reasons to be afraid of," said one of the women, with an emphatic nod.

But here the voice of the heroine of the occasion rose high above the rest.

"John Burrill wasn't so drunk as to run away from a man he never saw, or to see crooked," she said, fiercely. "I saw the look on his face, blinded tho' I was, and he's afraid of *you*, Doctor Heath. I don't know why. There's some secrets in John Burrill's life that I don't know, and there's more that I wish I didn't know; but here, or somewhere else, he has known you, sir. Perhaps only by sight; but he's afraid of you, that's certain."

There was no reply from Doctor Heath; he was busy over his medicine case. He prepared a lotion to be applied to the bruises, and a sedative to be applied to the nerves of the patient, who was beginning to recover herself in a measure, and launched out into a torrent of invective against the author of her trouble; after which she rushed into a wild recital of her wrongs, beginning at the time when she left a good place in England, to follow the fortunes of John Burrill, and running with glib tongue over the entire gamut of her trials since. And all of this, although it was far from new to the dwellers of Mill Avenue, was listened to by them with absorbed interest, and the proper accompaniment of ejaculations, at the proper places. During this discourse, to which Brooks listened with evidences of liveliest interest, Doctor Heath remained seemingly inattentive, waiting for a lull in the storm; when it came at last, he ascertained as briefly as possible, who among the women would remain, and pass the night with Mrs. Burrill; gave her direction, as to the use she was to make of the medicines he had prepared, and buttoned his coat about him, preparatory to departure.

As his hand was upon the latch, the voice of his patient arrested him.

"Doctor," she said, earnestly. "It wouldn't be gratitude in me to let you go away without a word of warning. I don't want to pry into your affairs, but let me tell you this: You are not done with John Burrill; you took him by surprise to-night; but, I'll wager he is over his scare by now, and he is plotting how he can get another sight at you, unbeknown to

yourself; and, if he has reason to be afraid of you, then look out for him; *you* have reasons for being afraid too."

Doctor Heath hesitated a moment, and a shade of annoyance crossed his face, then he said in his usual careless tone:

"Give yourself no uneasiness about this matter, madam; I never saw the scoundrel before, and he was simply afraid of my fist. However, if he ever should cross my path, be assured I shall know how to dispose of him;" and Clifford Heath bowed and went out into the night, little recking that he had left his life in the hands of five old women.

In a short time, Brooks arose and shuffled out, and then the tongues were once more loosened; the husband attendant had been ordered home with his two charges, and the chief subject of their converse was Doctor Heath, and the strange influence he had exerted upon John Burrill; and a fruitful theme they found it.

Meantime, John Burrill, who had fled straight on down the gloomy length of Mill Avenue, found himself, and his senses, together, close under the shadow of one of the huge factories, and at the river's very edge.

Here, breathless and bespattered, he sat down upon a flat stone to recover himself, and review the situation.

"Curse the man," he muttered. "I would not have made such a fool of myself for a gold-mine; but I couldn't have helped it for two," he added, after a moment's reflection, "if it's the man I supposed it to be! But it can't be! It is not."

He was by this time comparatively sober, and he arose to his feet; finally, feeling his courage returning, but still deep in thought, "Hang the luck," he muttered, kicking viciously at a loose stone. "If that's the man I fear, then Jasper Lamotte would be glad to know him. Why!" starting suddenly erect, "I can find out, and I will. I must for my own safety," and John Burrill faced about and retraced his steps.

Cautiously this time, he went over the ground, heeding where he set his foot, lest some misstep should betray his presence in Mill Avenue still; more and more cautiously as he neared the house from which he had so lately fled.

Closer and closer he crept, until at last he was under the window of the kitchen, and here he crouched, listening. He heard the mingled confusion of voices, then the firm tones of Clifford Heath, clear above the rest. Hearing this, he moved quickly away, for he was in instant danger of detection, should the door open suddenly, as it might at any moment.

He crossed the street and standing under the shadow of a small tenement, waited.

It was not long before the door opened, and the light from within showed him the tall form of Clifford Heath, clearly outlined against the darkness.

Out strode Heath, walking so rapidly that the not yet quite sober John Burrill found himself compelled to exercise care, and expend some breath in keeping him within sight.

On and on went the pursued and the pursurer, and presently, out of the darkness, came a third form, gliding shadow-like, as if every step of the way were too familiar to render caution necessary. This third form, drew nearer and nearer to Burrill, who, all unconscious of its proximity, laboured on after Doctor Heath.

Straight to his own cottage went the doubly shadowed young physician; he opened the door with a latch key, and the followers lost him in the darkness of the unlighted vestibule. Presently, however, a light was seen to glimmer through the partially closed blinds, and then John Burrill crept cautiously nearer, and feeling his way carefully, lest some obstacle at his feet should cause him to stumble, he gained the window, pressed his face close to the shutters and peered through.

Clifford Heath was pacing up and down his cosy sitting-room, seemingly lost in perplexed thought, and, as again and again his face was turned to the light, the watcher studied it closely; finally he seemed satisfied with his scrutiny, for he turned away and groped back to the street once more.

"It's the other one," he muttered, drawing a long breath of relief. "I might have known it from the first. So he is the young Doctor they tell of! Well, it's a rum game that brings him here, and it's certain he don't want to be known. He can't know me, and—Jove, I'd like to pay him for the hits he gave me;" and he fell to pondering as he turned his steps, not the way he had come, nor yet toward Mapleton, but in the direction of "Old Forty Rods." But long before he reached his destination, the creeping, stealthy shadow, had ceased to follow, and had vanished down a side street.

A few lights were glimmering, here and there, as he turned down the, not very elegant, street on which was located the haven of

"Forty Rods," and when he was within a block of the place, a man, coming suddenly around the corner, ran square against him.

Burrill uttered an oath, as he with difficulty regained his balance, but the new-comer called out in a voice, a little unsteady from some cause:

"Helloa! B—Burrill, that yer, ole feller? Didn't mean ter knock against yer, give ye my word I didn'. Give us a fiss, ole man, an' come 'long to Forty's!"

"Brooks," said Burrill, taking him sociably by the arm, and facing toward the saloon in question. "Brooks, you're drunk; you're beastly drunk; drunk as a sailor, by all that's sober." And together they entered "Old Forty Rods."

CHAPTER XX.

CONSTANCE AT BAY.

"It is impossible, sir! utterly impossible! and, pardon me for saying it, most absurd! This matter has been dragged on too long already. And on such evidence I utterly refuse to follow up the case. You have done well, undoubtedly, but it was only at the urgent request of Mr. Lamotte that I have allowed it to continue, and now I wash my hands of the whole affair."

It is Constance Wardour who speaks, standing very straight and with head very firmly poised, and wearing upon her face what Mrs. Aliston would have called her "obstinate look." Her words were addressed to a well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking young personage, who is neither young nor yet middle-aged, and who might pass for a solicitor with a good run of clients, or a bank cashier out on special business. He is looking somewhat disconcerted just now, but recovers his composure almost as she ceases speaking.

"But, madam," he expostulates mildly, "this is unheard of, really. You employ me upon a case which, just now, has reached a crisis, and when success seems almost certain you tell me to drop the case. I never like to drag forward my own personality, Miss Wardour, but really this is a blow aimed directly at my professional honour."

There is an ominous flash in the eye of the heiress, but her voice is smooth and tranquil, as she replies:

"I am sorry if this should injure *you*, Mr. Belknap, but, pardon me, I scarcely see how it can; you, as I understand, are a '*private detective*,' answerable to no one save yourself and the one employing you. I, as that one, pronounce myself satisfied to drop the case. I decline to use the circumstantial evidence you have brought against a man who is above suspicion, in my mind, at least. Let the Wardour diamonds rest in oblivion. Mr. Belknap, I am ready to honour your draft for any sum that you may deem sufficient to compensate you for the trouble you have taken, as well as for the *hurt* done your professional pride."

Private Detective Belknap stood for a moment, pondering, then he lifted his head and said, with an air of injured virtue beautiful to contemplate:

"Miss Wardour, of course there is no appeal from your decision. In my profession it often happens that we are compelled to unmask fraud and deceit in high places, and to wound the feelings of some we profoundly respect. While in your employ, I was bound to work for your interest; I owed a duty to you. Being dismissed from your service, I owe a duty still to society. As an officer of the law, it becomes my duty, being no longer under your commands, to make known to the proper authorities the facts in my possession. I do not know this Doctor Heath, consequently can have no object in hunting him down; but, believing him guilty, and holding the proof that I do, I must make known the truth, otherwise I should be compromising myself, and compounding a felony." Here Mr. Belknap took up his hat. "I will send in my statement of expenses, &c., to-morrow, Miss Wardour. This withdrawal of the case has been so sudden, so unexpected, that I am not prepared for a settlement of accounts." And Mr. Belknap turned slowly toward the door.

But the heiress stopped him by a gesture.

"Stay a moment, sir," she said, and the ominous gleam was intensified into a look of absolute hatred, for an instant. "I hope I do not quite understand your meaning. Did you intend to tell me that if I dismiss you from my service, you will still continue the search for my diamonds?"

"No, madam; I will simply place the facts I have gathered before the town authorities, and leave them to use the knowledge as they see fit. I then withdraw from the field, unless called upon as a witness, when, of course, I must do my duty."

Miss Wardour stood for some moments in silent thought, one small foot tapping ner-

vously the while, a sure sign of irritation with her. At last she said, slowly, and with an undertone of sarcasm, that she made a futile effort to conceal :

"I think I comprehend you, Mr. Belknap, and I withdraw my dismissal. You are still retained on the Wardour robbery case; I suppose, therefore, you are subject to my orders ?"

Mr. Belknap laid down his hat, and returned to his former position. Without a trace of triumph or satisfaction in his face or manner, he said :

"I am subject to your commands, certainly, Miss Wardour; but I beg that you will not misapprehend me."

"Be easy on that point," interrupted Miss Wardour, somewhat impatiently. "Now then, Mr. Belknap, I want a little time to consider this matter, and to consult with my aunt; also to see Mr. Lamotte. During this time I desire you to remain passive, to make no move in the matter; above all, to mention your suspicions to no one. You can, of course, keep as close a watch as you may please over Doctor Heath, but it must be done quietly, do you comprehend ? You are to say nothing of this matter not even to Mr. Lamotte."

Once more the detective took up his hat.

"I comprehend," he said, gravely; "you shall be obeyed to the letter, Miss Wardour; for three days, then, my task will be an easy one. On Friday morning I will call on you again."

"That is what I wish," she said; "I will have further instructions for you then."

With the bow of a courtier, the private detective withdrew from her presence, and for a moment the heiress stood as he had left her, gazing at the door through which he had disappeared, as if she were seeking to transfix an enemy with the angry fire of her eyes. Then she struck her hands together fiercely, and began a rapid march to and fro across the room.

"Ah!" she ejaculated; "the sleek, smooth, oily-tongued wretch! To dare to come here and make terms with *me;* to fairly compel me to keep him in my service; and to bring such a charge against *him.* If he had an enemy, I should call it a wretched plot. But I'll not be outwitted by you, Mr. Belknap; I have three days' grace."

She continued to pace the room with much energy for a few moments, and then seating herself at a writing table, rapidly wrote as follows :

NEIL BATHURST, ESQ.,

No. —— B—— street,

N.Y.

Dear Sir.—If in your power, be in W—— in two days, without fail. Danger menaces your friend, Dr. H——, and I only hold Detective B—— in my service to bridle his tongue. I fear a plot, and can only stay proceedings against the innocent, by proclaiming the truth concerning my diamonds; acting under your advice, I will withhold my statement until you arrive.

Hastily, &c.,

CONSTANCE WARDOUR.

There was yet an hour before the departure of the eastern mail, and Constance sealed her letter, and dispatched it by a faithful messenger; this done, she pondered again.

The private detective had waited upon her that morning with a strange statement. For weeks he had been working out this strange case, guided by the fact that the chloroform administered to Constance was scientifically meted out. He had commenced a system of shadowing the various medical men in W——, without regard to their present or previous standing. Nothing could be found in the past or present of any to cause them to fall under suspicion, until he came to investigate Doctor Heath. Here what did he find ? First, that his antecedents could be traced back only so far as his stay in W—— had extended. Nothing could be found to prove that his career had been above reproach, previous to his sojourn here; hence, according to the reasoning of Mr. Belknap, it was fair to suppose that it had not been. "For," argued the astute private detective, "where there is secresy, there is also room for suspicion." And Constance felt a momentary sinking of the heart, when she recalled the words she had overheard, as they fell from the lips of Clifford Heath : "Here, I am Clifford Heath, from nowhere." Starting with a suspicion, the private detective had made rapid headway. He had ascertained beyond a doubt that Doctor Heath's expenses, taken all in all, were in excess of his profesional income. He might have a private income, true; but this was not proven, and then there *was* a mystery that the accused had tried in vain to hide from the eyes of the hunters. There was a correspondence that was carried on with the utmost caution, letters received that had thrown him quite off his guard, and that were destroyed as soon as read. Finally and lastly, there was the bottle broken into fragments and thrown to the dust-heap; but,

without doubt, the counterpart of the one found at Miss Wardour's bedside on the morning of the robbery; while, among some cast-off garments had been found the *half of a handkerchief*, that matched precisely the one found over the face of the heiress. All these facts Mr. Belknap had laid before her with elaborate explanations, and "notes by the way," but instead of drawing from her the expected indignant demand for the instant arrest of the accused one, Miss Wardour had listened coldly, and with marked impatience, and had finally declared her decision not to move in the affair, nor to allow any one to act in her behalf.

As Constance reviewed the arguments of the detective, a new thought came to her. Doctor Heath, all unconscious of the danger menacing him, might in some way, do himself an injury, and add to the chain of circumstantial evidence that was lengthening for his overthrow. He must be warned.

This was a delicate task, and she hesitated a little over the manner of accomplishing it.

Finally, she seated herself once more at her desk and wrote another letter, or rather a note.

It contained only a few lines, and was addressed to, "*Mr. Raymond Vandyck.*"

Meanwhile, private detective Belknap was driving slowly in the light buggy, that had brought him to Wardour Place, toward the residence of Jasper Lamotte. His features wore a look of complacent self-satisfaction, and he hummed softly to himself, as he drove easily over the red and brown leaves that were beginning to flutter downward and carpet the highway.

Arriving at Mapleton; he drove leisurely up the avenue, and lifting his eyes toward the stately edifice crowning the hill, he saw, standing on the broad piazza, and gazing directly toward him, a beautiful woman, clad in trailing silk, and wearing a shawl of richest crimson cashmere, draped about her head and shoulders. As he drew nearer, he was startled at the strange mingling of pallor and flame in her face; the temples were like blue-veined ivory, and the slender hands, clasping the folds of crimson, seemed scarcely strong enough to retain their hold; but the lips and cheeks were a glowing crimson, and the eyes burned and glowed with a steady intense light.

"So," thought private detective Belknap, "I have not left all the beauty behind me, it seems. I suppose this is the daughter of mine host."

And so thinking, he reined in his horse upon the gravelled drive and, lifting up his hat, with elaborate courtesy, said:

"I believe this is Mapleton."

The lovely brunette allowed the crimson shawl to drop from about her head as she came slowly down the steps, never once removing her dark searching eyes from his face.

"This is Mapleton, sir. May I ask if this is Mr. Belknap?"

Somewhat surprised, he answered in the affirmative.

"Mr. Belknap, the detective," she persisted, and then seeing that he hesitated over his answer, she added, "I am Jasper Lamotte's daughter, and know that he expects you."

"I am the man Mr. Lamotte expects," he said, throwing down the reins and springing from the buggy. "Is Mr. Lamotte at home?"

"My father is in the library," she replied, coming still nearer him, "follow me, Mr. Belknap, I will send a servant to take your horse."

He followed her up the steps, and across the broad piazza; as they passed under the shadow of the arched doorway, she paused, looked about her, and then, drawing close to the detective and laying one hand lightly on his arm, she whispered:

"Mr. Belknap, I have a word for your ear alone. Can you meet me to-night where we shall be secure from intrusion?"

Her burning eyes searched his face, and accustomed as he was to strange situations, Mr. Belknap was startled for a moment out of his self-possession.

"I have need of your professional services," she hurried on, "and they must be rendered very secretly. Will you hear what I have to say?"

The beautiful face was full of wild eagerness, and Mr. Belknap was not insensible to the piquancy of the situation.

"I am yours to command, madam. Name the place and hour," he replied gallantly.

Then meet me at the boat-house—you can see it from here—to-night at nine. Be sure you are not followed, and, above all, do not mention to my father, or any one, this meeting of ours. You will be punctual?"

"As the hour itself."

"Thanks. Come in now, sir; I will send a servant to announce your arrival."

She threw open the door of the drawing-room, motioned him to enter, inclined her head in a graceful adieu, and swept down the hall.

Two minutes later he stood in the library bowing before Jasper Lamotte and his son Frank.

"Ah, it's you, Belknap," said the elder Lamotte. "And what news?"

"Very little, sir."

"But," interrupted Frank, "surely you have fired your train?"

"Yes, and I have run against the worst impediment that ever comes in a detective's way."

"And what is that?"

"A woman."

CHAPTER XXI.

APPOINTING A WATCH-DOG.

DOCTOR HEATH stood at his office window looking out upon the street, and whistling softly. Below, and directly under his gaze, stood a fine bay horse, harnessed to a new light road waggon; and horse and owner were somewhat impatiently waiting the arrival of Ray Vandyck, who was under engagement to drive with Doctor Heath, and pass his opinion on the "points" of the handsome bay, a recent purchase of the doctor's, who was a lover of a good horse and a fine dog, and was never without one or more specimens of each.

A quick step behind him caused him to bring his tune to an abrupt close, and he turned to see Ray, who had entered hurriedly, leaving the door ajar, and was busy breaking the seal of a small cream-tinted envelope.

Clifford Heath favoured him with a quizzical glance, and came away from the window.

"That's a dangerous-looking document, Ray," laughed the doctor, throwing himself down in his own favourite chair with the air of a man resigned to anything.

"I've a shuddering horror of anything so small and delicately tinted. But read it, my boy; it's your fate to be persecuted, you are so amiable."

Ray lost no time in opening and scanning the dainty note, and he now turned a perplexed face toward his friend.

"I'll be hanged if I can understand it," he said, fliping the note between his thumb and fingers.

"Of course you can't, 'it' emanated from the brain of a woman. I only hope your inability to comprehend the incomprehensible is the worst feature in the case."

"But it isn't," protested Ray. "I must renounce my drive, and your charming society."

"Really! is she so imperative, and are you so much her bond slave?"

Ray laughed. "Imperative," he cried. "You need not have asked, had you known the name affixed to this missive, and you would obey it with as much alacrity as I shall. Listen, Heath: I can trust you with a secret, if this be one." And, unfolding the note, he read:

RAYMOND VANDYCK, ETC.

My Friend: By coming to me, *at once*, on receipt of this note, you will do me a great favour, and perhaps do one who is your friend, an essential service. Come at once, to

Yours in waiting,
CONSTANCE WARDOUR.

"There," said Ray, refolding the note; "now what say you?"

"That Miss Wardour's commands are to be obeyed; and—as your horse is stabled, and mine is at the door, you had best take mine and lose no time. Perhaps you may be dismissed as speedily as you are summoned, and we may take our drive after all. Go, go, my son;" and he waved his hand theatrically.

"Thank you, Heath. You are a generous fellow; but don't look for your red roan steed until you see it back. I shall place that and myself at Miss Wardour's disposal. She shall find that she has summoned no laggard knight."

"Who talks of playing the knight to Miss Constance Wardour's 'fair ladye?' Let him have a care!" cried a gay voice from the doorway. And turning their eyes thither, they saw the dark, handsome face of Frank Lamotte.

A shade of annoyance crossed the face of young Vandyck, but he retorted in the same strain:

"I am that happy man. Stand aside, sir. I go to cast myself and all my fortune at her feet." Then, turning a wicked look back at his friend in the big chair, he cried, "Heath, adieu! look your last on the red roan steed. I may be going 'O'er the hills and far away,'—who knows?"

"You may be gone"—

"Deep into the dying day."

"That's the thought that distresses me," retorted the doctor. "But go, go, egotist!"

With a laugh, and another backward meaning glance at the doctor, young Vandyck pocketed his note, took up his hat, and murmuring a mocking adieu in the ear of

young Lamotte, ran lightly down the steps, and, a moment later, the swift fall of hoofs told them he was off.

"What the deuce ails the fellow?" said Lamotte, sourly, tossing his hat and himself down upon the officedivan. "Prating like a schoolboy about a summons from Miss Wardour."

"He means to get to Wardour Place without loss of time, if one may judge from the manner of his going. You know," smiling behind his hand, "Ray is a prime favourite at Wardour."

"I did not know it" returned Lamotte, sulkily. "Vandyck don't seem to realise that I have a prior claim, and that his twaddle, therefore, only serves to render him ridiculous."

Clifford Heath dropped his hand from before his face, and turned two stern, searching eyes upon the young man.

"*Have* you a prior claim?" he asked, slowly.

For a second the eyes of Frank Lamotte were hidden by their long lashes; then they were turned full upon the face of his interlocutor, as their owner replied firmly:

"I have."

* * * * * * * *

Raymond Vandyck lost no time on his drive to Wardour Place; and before he could frame any sort of reasonable guess as to the possible meaning of Constance's note, he found himself in her very presence.

"Ah, Ray!" she exclaimed, extending a welcome hand, "you are promptness itself. I hardly dared hope to see you so soon."

"I met your messenger on the road, as I was riding in to keep an appointment with Heath," exclaimed Ray, "but as I was in company with Bradley, our new neighbour, you know, I did not open the note until I got to Heath's office. Then, as your note was urgent, and Heath's horse at the door, I took it, and here I am, very much at your service, Conny."

"And I don't know of another who *could* be of service to me just now, Ray," she said, seriously; "neither do I know just how to make use of you. Ray," suddenly, "are you burdened with a large amount of curiosity?"

"About the average amount, I think?"

"Well, I am about to give that curiosity a severe test."

"Seriously, Conny, unless your secret concerns some one especially dear to me, I can survive being kept in the dark."

"And being made to work in the dark?"

"Yes, that too, under your orders, for I know I should risk nothing in obeying them."

"I should set you no dangerous or dishonourable task, of course, Ray."

"I am sure of that, Conny; command me; don't hesitate."

But she did hesitate, not knowing just how to tell him that she was Doctor Heath's friend, in spite of appearances, without telling, or revealing otherwise, too much. How could she set the matter before him, as she wished him to see it?

Seeing her hesitate, Ray unwittingly came to the rescue, and Constance seized upon the idea he gave her, with hasty eagerness, little thinking of the results that were to follow her implied deceit.

"I can't feel too grateful for your confidence at any price," he said, laughingly; "when I think how Lamotte glowered at me when he saw me coming here. But, then, if rumour speaks the truth, he has a right to be jealous, eh, Constance?"

Here was a way out of her dilemma; let Ray imagine her engaged to Frank Lamotte, and he would not misconstrue her interest in Doctor Heath; as for Frank, he had been a suitor, and a most troublesome one, for so long, that she thought nothing of appropriating him to herself, as a matter of convenience, and only for the moment, and she never thought at all of the injury she might do herself by this deception.

"Oh, yes!" she replied; "I have given Frank the right to be as jealous as he pleases." And the hot blood flamed into her cheek, as she saw how readily he had taken her words as she had meant them to be understood.

"Lamotte's a lucky fellow," said Ray, "although I know a better man I would like to see in his shoes. But we won't quarrel over Frank. It is him that I am to serve?"

"No," she replied, colouring again. And once more he misapplied her confusion.

Constance was silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then she came directly to the point.

"Some strange things have come to my knowledge concerning Doctor Heath, Ray. They have come in such a manner that I would be in a measure violating the confidence of another where I to make a statement in full, and yet—in some way Doctor Heath must know that danger menaces him."

"Ah!" uttered Ray Vandyck, and Con-

stance, lifting her eyes to his face, caught there a fleeting look that caused her to ask suddenly:

"Ray, have you heard anything about Doctor Heath? anything strange, I mean, or unexpected?"

"Why," replied Ray, slowly. "I have nothing very strange to relate, but—Heath's encounter with Burrill a short time since has made some talk."

"I don't understand you."

"Then it is not about this affair that you have sent for me?"

"Ray explain yourself. What of this 'affair,' as you call it?"

"Why, you see," began Ray, plunging into his recital after a fashion peculiar to himself, "about a week ago—yes, it was quite a week ago—on that stormy blustering Monday night, when sensible people stayed in doors, Heath, after the manner of doctors, was straggling about that lovely precinct known as Mill Avenue, trying to find the shortest way out after paying a visit to some sick child, or woman, I won't swear which; as I was saying, he was on his way out of that blessed avenue, when he heard screams coming from the cottage he was passing. It was the voice of a woman, and Heath made for the house, and rushed in just in time to see that latest addition to society, Mr. John Burrill, in a state of partial intoxication, raining blows about the head and shoulders of the woman who was once his wife. Heath rained one blow upon him and he went down under it. Then he got up, not quite satisfied and thirsting for more fight, and Heath felled him once more.

"It seems that the thing had been done so rapidly, that Burrill had not had time to get a fair look at the face of his assailant; but the second time he scrambled to his feet, Heath stood facing him full, braced and ready, when, behold, Burrill, after one look, turns as pale as a spectre, utters a yell of fear, and dashes out of the house like a madman. By this time several people had come in, and the thing puzzled them not a little. Heath asserted that he had never, to his knowledge, seen Burrill before; and yet there stood the fact of Burrill's fright at sight of him. Some believed it a case of mistaken identity; others, that Heath was trying to mislead them, and that he did know Burrill. The affair became noised about, as such things will be, and some were curious to see another meeting between Heath and Burrill. And here comes the queer part of the business. In his sober moments, Burrill avoids Heath, and cannot be brought to mention his name. But when he gets a little too much on board—beg pardon, Conny—I mean, somewhat intoxicated, he becomes very loquacious; then he throws out strange hints, and gives mysterious winks; states that he could tell a tale about Heath that would open everybody's eyes. He talks of 'borrowed plumage,' and insinuates that Heath would like to buy him off. He says that he took to his heels because he knew that Heath did not mean fair play, etc. Finally, two or three evenings ago, when Burrill was remarkably tipsy, and therefore, unusually ripe for a combat with any one, Heath and I, crossing the street opposite Spring's Bank, encountered him coming toward us, surrounded by a party of roughs. As we approached them, Burrill making some uncouth gestures, came forward, in advance of the rest, and as he came opposite Heath, leaned toward him, and whispered a few words in his ear. I don't know what he said, but the effect on Heath was magical. For a moment, he seemed staggered, as if by a blow, and then he took the fellow by the throat, and shook him until his teeth rattled; then loosed his hold, so suddenly, that his man dropped to the ground. Heath by this time was a little cooler; he stooped over the prostrate man, took him by the collar, and fairly lifted him to his feet; then he said:

"'Understand this, fellow, I allow no man to interfere with my business. This is only a sample of what will happen to you if you ever try this dodge again; keep my name off your tongue in public, and private, if you want whole bones in your body;' then he marched past the whole astonished crowd, minding them no more than if they were gnats. I followed, of course, and said as I came up with Heath:

"'Quite an adventure, upon my word; you seem to possess a strange attraction for Burrill!'

"'Burrill,' he exclaimed; 'who the mischief *is* the fellow, Ray?'

"'He is Mr. Lamotte's son-in-law, I answered.

"'Ah,' he mused; 'so Jasper Lamotte has married his daughter to a blackmailer;' and after that, he said never a word more on the subject. I had it on my mind to tell him of the hints and insinuations Burrill, in his unguarded moments, was putting into circulation, but his reticence closed my lips."

He paused, and looked to his auditor for some comment, but she sat with her eyes fixed upon the carpet, and a troubled look on her face.

"Don't think, Conny, that I am one of those who construe this against Heath," said the loyal fellow. "He is the best fellow in the world. The whole thing, for me, lies in a nutshell. Heath is not a man to disturb himself about his neighbour's concerns, and he don't expect his neighbours to interest themselves in his. This Burrill has picked up, somehow, a little information; something concerning Heath, or his past life, that is not known to W——, and he is trying to make capital of it. The secret in itself may be a mere nothing, but Heath is the first man to resent impertinences, and the last man to make explanations. And he's right, too, especially under the present circumstances. I like him all the better for his pluck, and his reticence; let him keep his secrets; so long as he gives me his friendship, I am quite content."

Constance felt a thrill of satisfaction, and a return of courage, as she listened. Here was a friend, loyal, enthusiastic, not to be alienated by slander or suspicion. She had known Ray from his childhood, and they had always been the best of friends, but she had never admired and honoured him, never valued his friendship so much, as she did at this moment.

His enthusiasm was contagious; she forgot all her fears, of a personal nature, and became in an instant the true woman and unselfish friend.

"Ah, Ray," she exclaimed, lifting two admired gray eyes to meet his, "you are a friend indeed! a friend to be proud of; but tell me, did you hear nothing more of Burrill after that second encounter?"

"He made some pretty loud threats," replied Ray, "and a fellow named Brooks, a sort of crony of Burrill's, took it upon himself to call upon Heath the next day, and advise him to keep a pretty close lookout for Burrill, as he was quite likely, in one of his drunken rages, to make an assault upon him. Heath thanked the fellow, and assured him that he was quite capable of taking care of himself, and Burrill, too, if need be; and Brooks backed out, declaring that he 'meant no 'arm by intrudin'.'"

"Ray," said Constance, earnestly, "John Burrill is not the only man Doctor Heath has to fear. I may have acted hastily in sending for you, but I was so troubled by certain facts that have just come to my knowledge, that I could not rest without doing something. It's almost an abuse of confidence to ask so much of you and tell you so little, but in a few days I hope to be mistress of my own tongue, and then you shall have all the particulars. For the present, Ray, promise to follow my instructions blindly."

"I have promised that, Conny."

"And, Ray, you will keep this all a secret; you will do your part without hinting to Doctor Heath your true motive, unless circumstances compel an explanation?"

"I promise that, too."

"When I sent for you, it was to ask you to warn Doctor Heath, in the most delicate way you could devise, that he was menaced by an enemy, and under hourly surveillance; but, since you have told me of this Burrill, it occurs to me that in some way he may be mixed up in this matter, and—I have thought of a better plan."

Ray nodded, and looked full of interest.

"Your description of his manner of receiving Burrill's interference, and of his reticence throughout, makes me feel that it might be only precipitating a catastrophe if we warned him, and so, Ray, I want you for three days, to be his constant shadow. Devise some excuse for remaining in town; thrust yourself upon his hospitality; observe any strangers who may approach him. If possible, do not let him get out of your sight, even for a short time; in three days you shall be relieved."

"By whom?"

She lifted her hand, warningly. "No questions, Ray. Can you manage all this?"

He pondered a while, then said: "I think I can; I am a pretty good actor, Conny. What do you say to my feigning illness?"

"He would find you out."

"Not if I did it well, perhaps. I think I could manage for a few days."

"It won't do, Ray. He would send you to bed and walk away and leave you."

Ray groaned.

"Tell him your room is undergoing repairs, and throw yourself on his mercy; then feign low spirits, and make him think it is his duty to entertain and cheer you up."

"Capital, Conny! We can make that work I know; your wit is worth more than my wisdom. For three days then, I am your watch-dog."

"And your friend's guardian."

"Precisely. I begin to swell with importance. But seriously, Conny, let me have your confidence at the earliest moment. For, whoever does battle with Heath, will find me arrayed against him, and—it's difficult fighting in the dark."

"You shall know all, as soon as possible, Ray, and now—"

"And now," repeated he, rising with alacrity, "Heath's horse stands outside, and Heath himself waits my return; so, lest he should grow impatient, and go where mischief awaits him, I will go now and begin my task."

"Thank you, Ray, I know I can depend upon you. All this seems like a scene out of a melodrama, but it's wretchedly real for all that. Ray, I am just waking up to a knowledge of how much plotting and wickedness there is in this world; even in our little world of W——."

"We all wake to that knowledge," he said, a spasm of pain crossing his face. "You know how the lesson came to me, Conny."

"Yes, poor Ray! and I know that another suffers, even more than you, because of it."

"And the cause of it all is another mystery. But no more of this; unless something noteworthy occurs, you will not see me again for three days."

She gave him her hand, and a look of gratitude and trust; and, in a few moments more, the red roan steed was speeding back townward.

Francis Lamotte had found the doctor dull company; and, as he scarcely ever remained in the office to read now-a-days, he had taken himself and his dissatisfaction elsewhere, long before Ray returned to the office ready to begin his new *rôle*.

He found the doctor sitting in a despondent attitude, almost where he had left him, holding in his hand a crumpled letter.

Without appearing to notice his abstraction, Ray came at once to the point at issue.

"Heath," he said, "your red roan is returned to you, and the loan of him encourages me to ask another favour."

"Well!" said the doctor, without looking up or changing his attitude.

"The fact is," said Ray, with splendid ingenuousness, "I am a sort of outcast. My quarters are undergoing that misery they call 'repairs,' and—the truth is, Heath, I want you to tender me your hospitality, for, say two or three days. I can't go to a public place; I don't feel like facing the music, for I am a little sore yet, and I find that I am still an object for commiseration, and I do get low spirited in spite of myself. It's cheeky, my asking it, I know, and you'll find my constant society a terrible bore; but my heart is set on quartering with you, so don't say no, Heath."

Clifford Heath threw off his listlessness and looked up with his usual cheery smile.

"Why, Ray, you young dog," he cried, "you beseech me like a veritable tramp, just as if you were not as welcome as the sunshine. Come along, you shall share my bed, and board, and—I'll be hanged if you shan't share the daily dose of abuse I have to take from my old housekeeper. I'll make a special arrangement to that effect."

"Thanks, Heath," replied Ray, and then he turned to the window to hide the fire that burned in his cheeks, because of the deceit he was practising upon this open-hearted friend. "But it's all for his benefit," he thought; "at least, I hope so."

"Well!" said the doctor, moving uneasily in his chair; "I hope your mission prospered."

"Oh, yes," carelessly.

"You—found Miss Wardour well, I hope?"

"Quite well; only wanting my valuable assistance in a little scheme she has on foot, a sort of benefit affair." And Ray congratulated himself on the adaptability of his answer.

"Is it too late to drive, Heath?"

But the doctor made no answer to this question, nor did he seem to hear it. Rising, he walked to the window, looked down thoughtfully into the street for a moment, then, without turning, he said:

"Rumour says, that Miss Wardour will marry Lamotte."

"Yes."

"Lamotte just now made the same statement."

"Ah!" contemptuously, "it's like him to boast; but I'm afraid he tells the truth; Constance admitted as much to me to-day."

A long time Clifford Heath stood motionless and silent at the window; then turning as if spurred by some sudden thought, he threw the crumpled note, which all the time had been clapsed in his hand, upon the table between them, saying:

"Here's a mystery, sir; read that and pass your opinion on it; as you are to become my

guest, you should know what society you will find yourself in."

Ray eyed the letter with his head on one side.

"What is it?" he asked in a stage whisper.

"A note, a *billet doux*, a solemn warning; came under the door a little while ago, while I was off in a reverie; came by a spirit hand, maybe, for I never heard a sound, but there lay the letter waiting to be observed and perused." And the doctor laughed contemptuously, and turned away to prepare for his drive. But Ray's face lengthened perceptibly, and he took up the note with sudden eagerness, and read:

DOCTOR HEATH,—Take the advice of a friend and leave W—— for a time. A plot is ripening against you, and your only safety lies in your absence, for your enemies are powerful and have woven a chain about you that will render you helpless, perhaps ruin you utterly.

TRUTH.

Lose no time, for the blow will soon fall.

The note was written in a cramped, reversed hand, and, after a hasty perusal, Ray bent his head and scanned the pen strokes closely, then he looked up with all the colour gone from his face, and a strange gleam in his eyes.

"How — how do you say this came, Heath?"

"I didn't say, for I don't know, my lad. It made its first appearance lying just there," and the doctor pointed with his wisp broom, which he had been vigorously applying to a brown overcoat, at the spot just inside the door where he had first perceived the letter, and then resumed his occupation without observing the trouble in Ray's face. "Sensational, isn't it? But I can't think of quitting W—— just as it begins to grow interesting."

"Then you take no stock in this warning?"

"Bah! why should I?"

"But if you should have secret foes?"

"Let them come on," quoted the doctor, theatrically; "bring along that precious document, Ray, and come along yourself."

Ray Vandyck, still looking troubled and anxious, arose, and, with lagging steps, followed his friend. As he noted with a new curiosity the tall, lithe, well-knit figure striding on before him, the handsome, haughtily poised head, and the careless indifference of mien, he asked himself:

"What can it be, this mystery and danger that surrounds him, that has caused Constance Wardour to take such unprecedented measures to insure his safety, and has wrung from Sybil Lamotte this strangely worded, oddly and ineffectually disguised warning?" For Ray, seeing not as the world sees, but with the eyes of love, had recognised in the strange scrawl the hand of the woman he had loved and lost.

"Heath *is* in some peril," thought he, and then, with a rueful sigh, "Oh! I would risk dangers too to be watched over by two such women."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WATCH-DOG DISCHARGED.

THE three days that followed were days of unrest to Constance Wardour. The intangible, yet distinctly realised trouble, and fear, and dread, were new experiences in her bright life.

The mystery round about her, her inability to cope with the unknown, the inaction, the waiting, was almost more than she could calmly endure; and all this distress of mind and unrest of body was for others. Personally, she had nothing to fear, nothing to annoy her; but the warm-hearted heiress made a friend's cause her own. From the first she had grieved over the sad fate of Sybil Lamotte; not lightly, not as society sorrows over the fall of its sometime *protégés*, but deeply, from her heart of hearts. And now there was added to this, her concern for Clifford Heath, and the danger that menaced him tormented her.

If her own honour were threatened she could not have been more troubled and full of fear; for in rebellion, in self-contempt, in a fierce burst of rage against the heart she could not control, Constance Wardour, heiress and queen absolute, was forced to confess to that heart that Clifford Heath's happiness was her happiness too.

Having been forced to recognise this fact, against her wish and will, Constance came to a better understand with herself, and she confessed to herself, with cheeks aflame at the recollection, that her petulant outbreak, and shameful accusation against Doctor Heath, was but the mutinous struggle of the head against the heart's acknowledged master. Too late came this self-confession. Sybil Lamotte's letter had never been found; the mystery surrounding its disappearance remained a mystery; and, how could she recall her accusation, while the circumstances under which it was made remained unchanged? Realising that she owed him reparation, she was yet powerless to make it.

"It would be equivalent to a confession, that I could not be happy without his friendship," she said, hotly. "And he would not accept an apology while his innocence remained unproved. Let me suffer the consequences of my own folly; I deserve it; but," setting her white teeth resolutely, "no harm shall come to him that I can avert; and I am not the weakest of women."

Oh, the perversity of women. Who can comprehend it? Who analyse the mysterious creatures?

When there was against Clifford Heath only a breath of suspicion, a few whispered words from his own lips, that might mean nothing of importance, when calmly reconsidered; a missing letter, with the contents of which he was familiar, and which, therefore, could be of little value to him, and it was enough. He stood before her accused, and went out from her presence wronged, insulted, splendid as King Arthur in his helpless indignation.

Now the detective's strong chain of evidence, John Burrill's strange insinuations and still stranger conduct, his words when he spoke, his reticence when he kept silence, all were arrayed against him, with telling effect, and in spite of them all, Constance Wardour angrily assured herself, and fully believed, that Clifford Heath was a wronged and innocent man. She did not reason herself into this belief; and it was absurd, of course. She arrived at her conclusions, as all loving women do, through her feelings, and her instinct. A woman seldom reasons, but in many cases her ready intuition is worth more than all man's wisdom. Her delicate instinct strikes directly at the truth, when man's reason gropes in darkness.

Constance went out very little during these troubled days, and for this there were several reasons. John Burrill's obtrusiveness was at its height, and he fairly haunted the vicinity of Wardour; and since the advent of Mr. Belknap, Constance had an uneasy feeling that she was in some way under surveillance. Nelly, who was argus-eyed, and always in armour on behalf of her mistress, had, on one or two occasions, spied a lurker about the premises; and Constance was resolved to give Mr. Belknap as little trouble, on her account, as possible. She had not visited Sybil for some days, for, although she had informed the detective that she desired to consult Mr. Lamotte, she had no such intentions; and, since the day when she had promised Mr. Lamotte to retain the detective for another week, she had avoided meeting him, and being forced to resume the conversation.

To know herself under the watchful eye of one detective, while anxiously expecting the advent of another, and to be aware that the presence of the one must not be made known to the other, afforded her a new and strange sensation; not altogether an unpleasant one either, for Constance was no coward, and had a decided taste for adventure.

She realised, too, the absurdity of being thus shadowed in her own house, by her own hired agent.

"I should go down to posterity as the first woman who ever hired a spy to watch herself," she mused with a little laugh. "I begin to think that I *am* an absurd creature, throughout."

Two days passed, and Constance endured them, although the hours crept slowly. On the third, her anxiety was almost beyond control.

If Bathurst should fail her! If her letter had not found him! If he were absent from the city! Oh, what a chance was here for disaster. Mr. Belknap would soon be in the field, and Ray's time had almost expired.

"Oh," she said, anxiously, "if he disappoints me, what *shall* I do. I must try Ray, and will he be strong enough to battle with this danger?"

While she mused thus, growing wild with anxiety, a half-grown boy, bearing on his head a small tray of delicate ivory carvings, was applying for admittance at the servants' entrance. He was shabbily dressed, but possessed a fine, intelligent face, and bore himself with cool confidence.

"I have brought the carving for Miss Wardour," he said briskly. "Can I see her, please?"

Nelly hesitated.

"She expects me," said the boy quickly; "and as I am a little late, I would like to show her the wares and be off, for I've more to sell in the village. Just tell her it's the chap she's looking for."

Constance stared in surprise when Nelly delivered this message.

"The chap I am looking for?" she repeated slowly; then, with a sudden brightening of her whole face, she added: "Oh, to be sure; I had almost forgotten. Send him here, at once, Nelly."

"I hope you will excuse me," began the

boy, apologetically; then, as Nelly closed the door, he dropped his voice, and said, "I come from Mr. Bathurst;" and, taking off his cap, he produced from thence a letter, which he put in her hand.

"I'm to wait for the answer," he said, and took up his position beside his wares.

Constance opened the letter, with a hand trembling with eagerness. It ran:

MISS WARDOUR:—By all means keep the secret of the diamonds, and trust all to me. I think it best not to come to you, as Belknap keeps a constant watch upon your movements; dismiss him as soon as you like. Have no fears regarding Heath, I have his enemies well roped; be assured that I shall be on hand when needed, and when you see me expect to have the question of the diamond mystery for ever set at rest. If you have anything to say, send verbal instructions by boy; he is to be trusted.

Yours sincerely,
NEIL J. BATHURST.

Constance heaved a sigh of relief, as she finished the perusal of this note, and after a moment's reflection, she said:

"Tell Mr. Bathurst that I will obey his instructions, and that Mr. Belknap will be dismissed from my service to-day."

"Yes, madam. Now if you will please to select some of these things for the sake of appearance."

"Of course; you are very thoughtful. Are you a young detective too?"

The boy looked up with a gleam of pride in his eyes.

"I have been in Mr. Bathurst's service two years, madam."

"Oh, then I have no fears as to your discretion; so I will ask you a question, knowing that you are wise enough to refuse me an answer if I am asking too much."

The boy smiled, and stood attentive. "May I ask if Mr. Bathurst is really now in W——, and when he arrived?"

The boy laughed an odd laugh, and full of mischief.

"Mr. Bathurst is here," he said. "I can't tell just *when* he did arrive."

"Then you did not come together?"

"We! Oh, no, indeed!" laughing again. "Mr. Bathurst is too smart for that."

Constance smiled with a returning feeling of ease and restfulness.

"Ah, I see I can trust Mr. Bathurst—and you, and lest I ask the wrong question if I continue, I will not ask another one. Tell Mr. Bathurst I rely on him to straighten all tangles; and that I like his messenger almost as much as his message."

"My, but ain't she a rum young lady," mused the boy, as he trudged away from Wardour Place with his lightened tray of ivories, "and handsome! Jingo! if I was Mr. Bathurst I'd work for her, just to see her smile, and no pay; but Lord, *he* don't care, he don't; he'll work just as hard for any old crone. He's another rum one."

"Ah, what a relief!" breathed Contance, reading for the third time Bathurst's reassuring note. "I begin to feel like myself once more. Now I am ready for you, Mr. private detective Belknap."

And, truly, Constance *was* herself once more. Poor Mrs. Aliston, sitting aloof, and almost abandoned during the days of her niece's perturbation of mind, was the first to receive the benefit of the returning sunshine. Constance, for reasons which any woman can guess, had kept her anxiety concerning Doctor Heath a profound secret from this good lady; and she, watching the signs of the times, made no comments, but speculated profoundly—and, wide of the mark.

"You should have gone with me to drive, yesterday, Con., said Mrs. Aliston to Constance, who, sitting in her aunt's room, half an hour after the departure of her small messenger, was endeavouring to atone for her neglect of the past few days by chatting cheerily upon every subject but the one which was of deepest interest to herself.

"You should have been with me and seen Sybil Lamotte."

"Sybil! Did you call there?"

"Oh, no. I can't get on with Mrs. Lamotte well enough to brave such a call alone; she is too stately and non-committal for me."

"You don't understand her, auntie. But Sybil, did you speak with her?"

"Yes, we met just over the bridge, and Sybil stopped the carriage to ask after you; I think she is anxious to see you."

"Poor Sybil!" said Constance, contritely, "I *have* neglected her of late; but we will drive there to-morrow; to-day I don't just feel like going out. Does Sybil look well, auntie?"

Mrs. Aliston leaned forward and lifted a plump forefinger to give emphasis to her words.

"Con., Sybil is dying or going mad, I can't tell which."

"Auntie! why?"

But Mrs. Aliston went on rapidly. "I never saw such a change; two weeks ago, one week ago, even the last time she came here, Sybil seemed nerved to bear her trouble; she carried herself well and seemed firm as a rock."

"Outwardly."

"Outwardly, of course; one couldn't feel much secret pride, compelled to live under the same roof with that low man she has married; but Sybil is not calm *outwardly* now; she has lost all that brilliant colour.

"So much the better; it was the outward token of a mental excitement that would soon drive her mad. Sybil should never have attempted to brave criticism, and bear her shame so publicly. Every time she has allowed that man to appear beside her in the streets of W——, has shortened her life as surely as slow poison could do it."

"Well, mark my word, she won't undergo the ordeal much longer; her eyes have lost their steady light and lustre, and have a wild, frightened, expectant look impossible to describe. When a horse came suddenly behind us, she started and almost screamed with fright, and I could see her hands tremble and her lips quiver for minutes after. Hands; they are mere claws! and she is growing more shadowy every day."

"Auntie, hush! you have made me as nervous as you picture Sybil. I shall not rest until I see her."

"There is a gentleman to see you, Miss Constance," said Nelly, from the doorway, which position she had gained unnoticed by the two ladies.

Constance gave a nervous start, and then arose hastily.

"Who is it, Nelly?" she asked, merely for appearance sake, for she fully expected to see Mr. Belknap.

"He didn't give his name, Miss, but said he come by appointment. It's the same gentleman as called a few days ago."

"Oh! then he won't detain me long," said the young lady, a resolute look coming into her eyes. "Auntie, I'll be with you again in a very few moments."

"He won't be very graciously received," was Mrs. Aliston's mental comment. "I know that gleam of the eye, and what it means."

But Mrs. Aliston was mistaken for once.

"Oh, Mr. Belknap," Constance said, sweeping into his presence with her proudest air, and smiling upon him her sweetest smile, "I am glad you have come."

"Promptness is our first lesson in my profession," replied he, with an affable smile.

"Yes! and have you learned anything new since Monday?"

"Nothing of importance. The party under suspicion has been entertaining a friend, and has been out very little."

"Oh!"

"One thing occurred on Monday last, not long after I had left you, which I can't help looking on with suspicion."

"Indeed! And may I hear it?"

"I think so. Without stopping to explain my modes of taking observations, I will give the bare fact. On Monday afternoon, while Dr. Heath was alone in his office, a boy, carrying on his head a tray of carvings, stopped at the foot of the stairs, set down his tray, ran up the flight like a young cat, and just as quietly, and slipped a note underneath the office door."

"Really!" in real surprise, and some disturbance of mind. "And you know nothing more about the note?"

"Nothing; but I shall soon, I trust."

"Then you intend following up this case, Mr. Belknap?"

He looked up with a start of astonishment.

"Is not that your intention?"

"Decidedly not."

"But—have you consulted with Mr. Lamotte?"

"I have consulted with no one, sir. I thought over the matter once more, and decided to let my own mind guide my actions."

"But Mr. Lamotte thinks the case should be pushed."

"Mr. Lamotte is my neighbour, not my guardian. He is good enough to advise me sometimes; I think he would scarcely presume to dictate."

"Ah! then I am to consider myself no longer in your service?"

She bowed her head.

"After I have cancelled my indebtedness to you," she said, serenely.

With a look of vexation that he could not hide, the private detective drew from his pocket a memorandum book, and from thence a slip of paper, which he handed to Constance.

"That is my statement," he said.

She ran her eye over the itemised account,

smiling a little as she did so. Then, rising swiftly, she said:

"Excuse me for one moment."

He bowed silently, and she went out, returning soon with a bank cheque, which she placed in his hands, saying:

"So ends the case of the Wardour diamonds. I shall not take it up again."

"What! Do you really mean that?"

"I really do."

The detective opened his lips, as if about to remonstrate, then closed them suddenly, and moved toward the door.

"Do you still cling to your intention of notifying the town authorities, and setting them upon Doctor Heath?" she asked.

He turned toward her, with a peculiar smile upon his face.

"You have offered a reward for your jewels, I believe?"

"You mistake, I have offered a reward for the apprehension of the thief or thieves."

"And—as you have withdrawn the case, shall you withdraw your reward also?"

"By no means."

"Then—if I bring you both the jewels and the thieves my reward should be doubled?"

A queer gleam shot from her eyes, as she answered, without hesitation:

"And so I shall. Place my robbers in the county jail, and put my diamonds in my hands, and you shall receive a double reward."

"Then, for the present, I shall keep my clues in my own hands; Miss Wardour, I wish you good morning." And the private detective stalked from the room with the air of a man who was overflowing with desirable information.

"That's a queer woman," mused Mr. Belknap, as he turned his face away from Wardour. "I can't make her out. If it were not altogether too fishy, I should say she had a suspicion concerning those diamonds. I intend to look a little closer into the doings of Miss Wardour; and, blow hot, or blow cold, I'm bound to have my reward, if, not by this, why by that."

With this enigmatical reflection, he looked up to behold, sitting by the roadside, a tramp of sinister aspect, who turned his head indolently as the detective approached, and then applied himself closer to a luncheon of broken victuals, eating like a man famished. Mr. Belknap, who, on this occasion, had visited Wardour on foot, came quite close upon the man, and then halted suddenly, putting his hand in his pocket, as if with charitable intent; instantly the tramp dropped his fragment of bread, and sprang to his feet, with outstretched hands, as if greedy for the expected bounty. He was a dirty, ragged fellow, undersized, but strong and sinewy, with an ugly, scarred face, and a boorish gait and manner. As the private detective withdrew his hand from his pocket and tendered the tramp a small coin, a passer-by, had there been such, would have called the scene a tableaux of alms-giving; but what the detective said was:

"Well, Roake, here you are; are you ready for business?"

And the tramp replied: "You bet, if it's a solid racket."

"Then follow me, at a distance, until we reach a place where we can talk things over." And Mr. Belknap moved on, never once glancing back.

The tramp once more seated himself beside the fence, and resumed his occupation. When the last scrap of food was devoured, he arose, and, taking up a rough stick that served as a cane, he followed the receding form of the private detective.

At sunset, Ray Vandyck presented himself punctually for further instructions at Wardour.

"You are released, Ray," said Constance, coming to meet him, with a bright face and a warm hand-clasp. "You are free to follow your own devices; Doctor Heath has a better guardian than either you or I."

"Cool, upon my word," said Ray, with a grimace. "So I am discharged without references?"

"Even so, and you must be content without an explanation, too, for the present. My tongue is still tied."

"Worse and worse, Conny; can't I even know who has supplanted me?"

"It's a great secret, and must be carefully guarded, but, I believe I will confide that much to you, as it does not conflict with any promises."

"Well! I listen."

"Doctor Heath is protected by an able detective. His name I must not communicate."

Ray Vandyck opened wide his handsome eyes, and gave vent to a long, low whistle.

"Conny, you are too deep for me," he said. "I am all at sea; I will drop the subject, as it is working severely upon my curiosity."

For a few moments they sat in silence, Constance thinking how much she regretted not asking Mr. Bathurst to make himself known to

this loyal friend, who must now be kept in ignorance, however worthy he might be of all confidence, and Ray thinking of something that caused his face to sadden, and his eyes to darken with inward pain. Presently he drew a little nearer his hostess, and asked, in a low, sorrowful tone:

"Conny, have you seen her lately?"

"Not for a week or more, Ray."

"I saw her yesterday."

"And she," anxiously; "did she see you, Ray?"

"No, thank God! She was driving with her mother, and, Con.," his voice broke and he turned his face away, "I wish you would go to her."

"Why, Ray?"

"Because—oh, you should have seen her face. She is suffering horribly; she is dying by inches."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATHER AND SON.

At early morn on the next day, Jasper Lamotte and his son Frank, were seated together in the dining-room of Mapleton.

Jasper Lamotte was hurriedly eating a bountiful and appetising lunch, and washing it down with plenty of light claret; and Frank was seated near the table, smoking a strong segar, and giving an attentive ear to the words of his sire.

"This is the first time that we have got the lead on Burrill," said the elder Lamotte, "and in some way it must be made to count. Drunk or sober, heretofore he has looked after his interests too closely to serve ours."

"The devil's got into Burrill," replied Frank, bending forward to knock the ashes from his black segar; "and into the rest of the family too, I should say; Evan has been bad enough any time within the memory of man, but look at him now. Why, he has not been sober for ten days."

"Well, he is sober this morning."

"Really, have you seen him?"

"Yes. I went to his room to ask him some questions about Burrill. I found him white as a cloth, and quite as limp; he had overdone himself at his last carouse; is as sick as a dog, and on the verge of delirium tremens, if a man ever was. He won't get out of his bed for a few days, if I am a judge; the room was full of medical perfumes, and his mother was trying to induce him to drink some hot coffee."

"And Burrill?"

"He knew nothing of him, and recommended me to look after my own vermin."

"He's a sharp-tongued cur," said Frank, with a short laugh.

"Next, I went to Sybil's rooms; she was sitting over a roasting fire, wrapped in a shawl, and shivering from head to foot; she almost shrieked at the mention of Burrill's name. Sybil looks bad, very bad. When we get these other matters safely settled, we must do something for the girl."

"And that means—"

"That we must master Burrill. We will soon be in a position to do it, I hope."

"I hope so," gloomily.

"We must be, or be ruined. You will settle this business with Constance, at once, to-day?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

"You suppose! Man, you talk as if you were leading a forlorn hope. Do you *expect* a refusal?"

"I don't know *what* to expect," flinging away his segar, angrily. "I can't understand Constance; I wish that cursed Heath were safely out of my path."

"Can't you trust him to Belknap?"

"There we are again! What is that confounded detective doing? He has been here five days, or nearly that; four days ago, Constance asked three days to consider upon the case. What did that mean? Belknap should have been here with his report long ago. Why don't he come?"

"That I can't tell you; he has his own way of doing things; his absence does not alter the fact that I must use this opportunity for getting to the city; and you must press this business with Constance, and bring it to a settlement. I don't think there is much doubt as to her answer."

"Well, I wish I could feel as sanguine, that's all."

At this moment there came the sound of wheels on the gravel outside, and glancing toward the window, Frank sprang up exclaiming:

"There's Belknap, and not a minute to lose. I'll go meet him," and he hurried out, wearing a look of relief, mingled with expectancy.

In a moment he returned, closely followed by the smiling detective.

"Quick, Belknap," said Frank, closing the door, carefully, "give us the important points. The carriage will be here in a short time, to

take the old man to town, and he must be in time, for trains won't wait."

"True," said Mr. Belknap, seating himself near the table. "I should have reported to you last evening, but thought it best to remain about town, and let myself be seen by the hotel loungers; people, in a place like this, are curious about a man who keeps too much to himself, and one must always conciliate suspicion."

"True," from Mr. Lamotte.

"I saw Miss Wardour yesterday, gentlemen; she entirely withdraws the case."

"What! entirely?" asked Frank.

"Entirely; she asked for my account, paid it, and dismissed me, saying, that she should not resume the search, but should double the reward."

"Double the reward?" repeated Frank.

"Yes, *provided* both the diamonds and the thieves were found."

A moment's silence and then the elder Lamotte emptied his glass and set it down, saying as he did so:

"Well, but the point is not yet reached. Did you explain the necessity you were under if the case left your hands?"

"I did. She was surprised, of course, and incredulous, but she made no remarks, and seemed not at all discomposed at the danger menacing Doctor Heath. After we had settled our business, she asked me if I should now drop the case and let the authorities work it out, or if I would continue to work independent of her."

"And you said what?" asked Frank.

"I said that circumstances must decide that."

"And she was not disturbed about Heath?"

"Evidently not; she was as cool as myself."

Frank drew a long breath of relief.

"And now, Mr. Lamotte," said the private detective, "what is the next move?"

"Perfect quiet for the next two or three days; like Miss Wardour, we will take time to consider. I am going to the big city to-day, Mr. Belknap; if you need any funds before I return, call on Frank. I shall be back in two days, and then we will decide upon our next move. Is that the carriage, Frank?"

It was the carriage, and almost before Mr. Belknap could realise it or gather together his scattered forces, Mr. Lamotte had shaken hands with him, nodded to Frank, donned his hat, gathered up his travelling coat, cane, and gloves, and was on his way to the carriage, followed by a servant, who carried his small travelling bag.

As may be seen, Mr. Belknap had made his "reports" according to his own lights, as for instance, giving his first interview with Constance in brief, on the same day it took place, merely stating that Miss Wardour requested time to consider; and reserving all that portion concerning Doctor Heath, until to-day, when he gave that too, in brief, and with many "mental reservations."

Mr. Belknap was a little bit nonplussed at this sudden journey of Jasper Lamotte's; he did not like to be so widely separated from his patron, even for a few days, and especially now; but it was too late to make an amendment to this state of affairs, so he contented himself with a segar and Frank's society. Not finding the latter of the best, and being able to enjoy the former anywhere, he soon took his leave, and drove back to his hotel, the best in W——, where he went straight to his room, ordered up a hot brandy, complained of a slight indisposition, and spent the remainder of the day and the entire evening in and about the hotel, lounging, smoking, reading, chatting, and always visible.

Meantime, Mr. Lamotte, arriving ten minutes early at the W—— depot, sauntered out among the people swarming about, and waiting the arrival of the fast express.

There was always a bustle about the W—— depot at this hour of the day, and Mr. Lamotte nodded graciously here and there, and stopped to extend a patronising hand to a chosen and honoured few. Presently he came face to face with a man who, with hands in his pockets, was watching the unloading of a belated dray.

"How do you do, Brooks," said he, glancing at the hands and face that were a little cleaner than usual, and at the pretence of a toilet that made the awkwardness of the fellow unusually apparent. "You seem taking a holiday. Are you bound to leave us?"

"That's what I am, sir," said the man, touching his hat. "Work's too scarce for me, sir, and bad company's too plenty. I've said I would go a dozen times, sir; and now I'm off."

"I am sorry we could not keep you on at the mills, Brooks; but—you know who was to blame."

"Oh, it was me, sir; I don't deny *that*.

It's hard for me to keep away from the liquor. But look here, Mr. Lamotte, sir: If you ever see me again, *you'll see me sober.*"

Mr. Lamotte uttered a sceptical laugh and turned away. The train was there, and it bore cityward the gentlemanly Mr. Lamotte, and the half-inebriated loafer, Brooks.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DAY OF GLOOM.

ALL that day, or what remained of it after his father's departure, and the almost simultaneous withdrawal of the private detective, Frank Lamotte passed in an uneasy reverie. He had much at stake; and, now that the crisis of his fortunes was so near at hand, he began to review his ground, and every word, look, and tone of Constance Wardour, as he recalled them, one by one, was to him a fresh puzzle.

Six months ago, Frank Lamotte would have scoffed at a refusal even from the proud Constance. Now, somehow, he had lost his self-confidence. Again and again he imagined the words that he would say, and the words he hoped that she would answer. Then, as he forced himself to face the possibility of defeat, the veins upon his temples swelled out, his teeth clenched, and one of those "attacks," to which he was subject, and against which Doctor Heath had warned him, seemed imminent. Again and again he gazed with proud satisfaction upon his reflected image, in the full-length drawing-room mirror, and turned away, vowing himself a fitting mate for any woman. Again and again, when the image of his own physical perfections had ceased to dazzle his vision, his heart sank within him, and a dismal foreboding put his courage to flight.

"Confound it all," muttered he, as he wandered aimlessly from one deserted room to another: "the very house seems under a spell. Sybil, sitting like a recluse in her own rooms, growing pale, and wild-eyed, and spectre-like, every day. Evan, in *his* room, sick with drink, and verging on the D.T. Mother, gliding like a stately ghost from the one to the other, or closeted in her own room; she has not been down-stairs to-day. Burrill, the devil knows where *he* is, and what took him out so unusually early this morning. He's been cutting it worse than ever for the past week; the fellow, seemingly, can't find company low enough for him, in one stage of his drunkenness, nor high enough for him in another. It's fortunate for us that liquor has at last relaxed his vigilance; the old man has taken a leading trick by the means. Curse the brute! Why won't he die in a drunken frenzy, or from over-feeding? but he won't!" Thus soliloquising, he lighted a segar and went out into the grounds. "I'll try the effect of a little sunshine," he muttered; "for the house feels like a sarcophagus; one would think the family pride was about to receive its last blow, and the family doom about to fall.

So, restless and self-tormented, Frank Lamotte passed the long afternoon, in the double solitude of a man deserted alike by his friends and his peace of mind.

"We make our own ghosts," said somebody once. Frank Lamotte's phantoms had begun to manifest themselves, having grown into things of strength, and become endowed with the power to torture, thanks to the atmosphere into which he had plunged himself and them.

Late in the afternoon John Burrill came home, but Frank avoided him, not caring to answer any questions at that time.

Burrill seemed to care little for this, or for anything; he was in a wonderfully jubilant mood. He rambled through the tenantless rooms, whistling shrilly, and with his hands in his pockets. He commanded the servants like a Baron of old. He drank wine in the library, and smoked a segar in the drawing-room, and when these pleasures palled upon him, he ascended the stairs, and went straight to the room occupied by Evan.

For some time past, Jasper Lamotte had made an effort to break the bond of good fellowship that, much to the surprise of all the family, had sprung up between the wild young fellow and the coarser and equally or worse besotted elder one. How even reckless Evan Lamotte could find pleasure in such society, was a mystery to all who knew the two. But so it was, and Jasper Lamotte's interdict was not strong enough to sever the intimacy. John Burrill responded to his exhortations with a burst of defiance, or a volley of oaths; and Evan received all comments upon his choice of a companion, with a sardonic smile or a wild, mocking laugh.

They had not been much together for the past few days, owing to the indisposition which had kept Evan away from their favourite haunts, but had not kept him away from his favourite beverage.

As Burrill entered his room, Evan received him with a shout of welcome, and for more than an hour they were closeted there, sometimes conversing in low, guarded tones, and sometimes bursting into roars of laughter, that penetrated even through the shut doors of Sybil's rooms, causing her to start nervously, and shiver as with a chill.

A little before sunset the carriage from Wardour deposited Constance and Mrs. Aliston at the door of this home of little harmony, and even Constance noted the unusual stillness, and whispered to her aunt, as they waited in the drawing-room the appearance of Mrs. Lamotte :

"Bah ! I sniff the ogre here, auntie. 'The trail of the serpent' is over the entire house."

"I sniff the dead odour of a vile segar," retorted Mrs. Aliston. "As for the ogre—if he won't appear in person, I'll try and survive the rest."

"I am very glad you have come, Constance," said Mrs. Lamotte, entering at this moment. "We are so dull here, and Sybil has wished much to see you." And then she extended a courteous but more stately greeting to Mrs. Aliston.

"It grieves me to hear that Sybil is not so well, dear Mrs. Lamotte. Does she employ a physician ? " asked Constance, presently.

"She will not have a physician called, much to my regret. The very suggestion makes her wildly nervous."

"And—she keeps her room too much. I think Frank told me."

"Yes, recently. But, Constance, go up to her ; Mrs. Aliston and I will entertain each other for awhile, and then we will join you. Sybil heard you announced, and will expect you."

Thus commanded, Constance lost no time in making her way, unattended, to Sybil's room.

In the upper hall she met Frank, who started, and flushed at the sight of her, and then hurried forward, with extended hand.

"Constance," he exclaimed, eagerly ; "how glad I am to see you."

"I'm such an uncommon sight !" she laughed, too much absorbed with thoughts of Sybil, to notice the extra warmth of his greeting, or a certain change of manner, that was a mingling of boldness, bashfulness, humility, and coxcombery.

"How do you do, Frank ? "

"Well in body, Constance—"

"Oh ! then we can easily regulate your mind. I'm going to see Sybil, and I don't want your company ; so adieu, Frank."

"One moment, please. I want to—I *must* see you, this evening. Shall you remain with us ? "

"No. Aunt Honor is below ; we go home, soon."

"Then—may I call, this evening, Constance ? "

"What a question ! As if you did not call whenever the spirit moved you so to do. Come, if you like, child ; I shall have no better company, I am afraid," and on she swept, and had vanished within his sister's room, before Frank could decide whether to be chagrined or delighted, at so readily given, carelessly worded, a consent.

The start, the nervous tremor, the terrified ejaculations, with which Sybil greeted even this expected and welcome guest, all told how some deadly foe was surely undermining her life and reason. And Constance noted with a sinking heart, the dark circles around the eyes that were growing hollow, and heavy, and full of a strange wild expectancy ; the pale cheeks, thinner than ever, and the woeful weariness of the entire face.

Greeting her tenderly, and making no comments on her changed appearance, Constance chatted for a time on indifferent subjects, and noted closely, as a loving friend will, the face and manner of her listener. Sybil sat like one in a trance, rather a nightmare, her eyes roving from her visitor's face to the door, and back again, and this constantly repeated ; her whole attitude and manner, that of one listening rather for some sound or alarm from afar, than to the words of the friend beside her.

At last, Constance finding common-place about exhausted, said :

"Congratulate me, child ! I have thrown off a burden from my shoulders ; I have brought my diamond investigations to a close."

"Ah ! diamonds ! " Sybil almost started from her chair, and the exclamation came sharply from lips white and trembling.

"Yes, my lost diamonds, you know, I have dismissed Mr. Belknap."

"Belknap ! " an unmistakable look of horror crossed her face. "Dismissed him ; oh, I wish *I* could ! "

Sorely at a loss, yet thinking it best not to seem surprised at what she believed to be the efforts of a wandering mind to grasp and

master the subject under discussion, Constance talked on, answering questions and making observations, without allowing Sybil to see the surprise and sorrow that filled her heart; and, not until many days latter did she recall her friend's wild words, to see how much of method there might be in this seeming madness.

"Mr. Belknap was conducting the search for the diamonds, you know, Sybil?"

Sybil seemed making an effort to collect her scattered senses.

"Yes, yes, Conny, go on," she whispered.

"I have paid him off and have done with him; that's about all, dear."

"Conny," in a half whisper, "is he *gone?*"

"I don't know about that; he said something about remaining here for a time."

"Oh!" ejaculated Sybil, and then, under her breath, "My God!"

Constance shuddered as she looked upon the shivering figure before her, the wavering eyes, the hands clenching and unclenching themselves. She found conversation difficult, and began to wonder how she could avoid subjects that brought painful thoughts or suggestions. But suddenly a change came over Sybil; sitting erect, she looked fixedly at her friend, and asked:

"Conny, has *he* tormented you of late?"

"He! Sybil; you mean—"

"I mean my curse! Has he dared to annoy you? He has sworn that he will be accepted and recognised as your friend."

Constance laughed a short, sarcastic laugh.

"Be at rest, Sybil; he never will."

"No;" with a strange dropping of the voice. "*He never will!*"

Again she seemed struggling to recover herself, and to recall some thought; then she looked up and asked abruptly:

"Conny, have you promised to marry my—Frank Lamotte?"

"No, Sybil."

"Then—promise, *promise* me, Constance, as if I were on my dying bed, that you never will."

"Why, Sybil, dear?"

"Don't ask for reasons, don't; promise, *promise*, PROMISE!"

She was growing excited, and Constance hastened to say:

"You are labouring under some delusion, dear child; Frank has not offered himself to me."

"But he will! he will! and I tell you, Constance, it will be giving yourself to a fate like mine, and worse. The Lamottes have not done with disgrace yet, and it shall not fall on you; promise me, Con."

"I promise, Sybil."

"You promise;" she arose from her chair and came close to Constance; "you promise," she said, slowly, "never, *never* to marry Francis Lamotte?"

"I swear it."

A coarse laugh, a smothered oath; they both turn swiftly, and there in the doorway, smelling of tobacco and brandy, and shaking with coarse laughter, is John Burrill, and beside him, with clenched hands, swollen temples, drawn, white lips, stands Francis Lamotte. Stands! No. He reels, he clings to the door-frame for support; his *enemy* is upon him.

Sybil draws herself erect; the red blood flames to her face; the fire darts from her eyes; she lifts one slender arm and points at the reeling figure; then there rings out a burst of mad, mocking laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha! Frank Lamotte, I have settled my account with you."

Then turning swiftly upon Burrill, and with even fiercer fury she shrieks:

"Out, out, out of my sight! I am almost done with you, too. Go back to your wine and your wallowing in the gutter; your days are numbered."

The awful look upon her face, the defiant hatred in her voice, the sudden strength and firmness of her whole bearing, Constance shuddered at and never forgot. Frank Lamotte, making a monstrous effort for self-control, gasped, let go his hold on the door-frame, lifted his hand to his temples, and came a few steps into the room. Outside, on the stairway, was the rustle of women's garments, the light fall of swift feet. In another moment Mrs. Lamotte, followed by Mrs. Aliston, enters the room, pushing past the gaping and astonished Burrill with scant ceremony. Then, Sybil's strength deserts her as John Burrill, recalled to a sense of his own importance, advances, and seems about to address her. She utters a cry of abhorrence and terror, and, throwing out her hands to ward off his approach, reels, falls, and is caught in the supporting arms of Constance and Mrs. Lamotte.

While they are applying restoratives Frank sees the propriety of withdrawing from the scene, but no such motives of delicacy or

decency ever find lodgment in the brain of John Burrill, and leering with tipsy gravity, he presses close to the bedside and poisons the air with his reeking breath. Constance flushes with anger, and glances at Mrs. Lamotte. That lady looks up uneasily, and seems to hesitate, and then Mrs. Aliston rises to the occasion, and covers herself with glory.

Looking blandly up into the man's face, she lays one fat, gloved hand upon his arm, and says, in a low, confidential tone:

"Come this way one moment, sir, if you please," and she fairly leads the wondering and unsuspecting victim from the room. A second later he is standing in the passage, the chamber door is shut swiftly and locked securely. John Burrill has been led out like a lamb, and the fat and smiling strategist comes back to the bedside.

"I suppose he thought I would tell him a secret when I got him outside," she laughs, softly.

Whatever he thought he kept to himself. After uttering a few curses he went below, "returned to his pipe and his bowl," and waited the dinner hour.

"I shall send for Doctor Heath," said Mrs. Lamotte, as she bent above her daughter, who had slowly returned to consciousness, but lay passive, seeming not to see or know the friends who stood about her. "Sybil does not know us; I feel alarmed."

Mrs. Aliston nodded sagaciously. "He can not come too soon," she said; then to Constance, with a mingling of womanly tact and genuine kindliness, "My child, you had better drive home soon. If Mrs. Lamotte wishes, or will permit, I will stay to-night. It will be better, believe me, Mrs. Lamotte, than to share a watch with any servant; and I am a good nurse."

So it is arranged that she shall stay, and Constance proposes to return alone to Wardour.

As she goes down stairs to her carriage, from out the shadow of the drawing-room comes Frank Lamotte, still very haggard, and trembling with excitement suppressed.

"Constance!" he whispers, hoarsely, "one moment, please."

She pauses before him, very pale and still.

"Constance," speaking with an effort, "I—went up there, hoping to keep Burrill from intruding; he was too quick for me, and—and I heard Sybil's last words—and yours."

No answer from the pale listener.

"My sister asked you to refuse me. Am I right?"

"You heard."

"And you promised?"

"I promised."

"Constance, Sybil is half mad. You surely were only humouring her whim in so replying."

"Sybil *is* half mad. I begin to think that you know why."

"We all know why. She has sacrified herself for an ingrate; she has saddled us all with a monster, to save a brother who is not worth saving."

"Frank Lamotte, stop; I cannot listen to this; for, let me tell you that I know this charge against Evan Lamotte to be false, and I know that you know it; and yet you have sanctioned the fraud. Who has blighted Sybil's life, you may know, but it is not Evan."

"Constance do you mean—"

"I mean all that I say. Let me pass, Frank."

"Not yet. Constance, Constance! had you never any love for me? Is there no shadow of hope?"

"At first," said Constance, coldly, "I liked you as Sybil's brother; later, I tolerated you; now you are teaching me to despise you. Long ago I told you that only yourself could injure yourself in my eyes. There might have been a reason, an excuse even, for allowing poor Evan, who has willingly assumed the position, to become the family scape-goat. There is none for your unbrotherly and false accusation. Whatever his faults may be, poor Evan is unselfish, and he truly loves his sister."

"Is this your answer?"

"What do you expect? Do you want my assurance that my promise to Sybil was made in good faith, and that I intend to keep it? If so, you have it." She went swiftly past him, with the last words on her lips. And again Frank Lamotte was the prey of his enemy; like a drunken man, he reeled back into the parlour, gnashing his teeth, cursing his fate, half mad, and wholly desperate.

Meanwhile, above stairs, John Burrill was rehearsing to Evan, after his drunken fashion, the recent scene in Sybil's room, not even omitting his own expulsion by wily Mrs. Aliston. As he repeated, with wonderful accuracy, considering his condition, the wild words uttered by Sybil, his listener sat very erect, with wild staring eyes, and lips held tightly together, his teeth almost biting through them;

with burning eyes, and quivering frame, and a strange fear at his heart.

Having finished his narrative, Burrill arose:

"I'm to meet some fellows at Forty's," he said, thickly. "I'll stop with them a couple of hours, or three, maybe; after that—" and he winked significantly.

"After that," repeated Evan, and winked in return.

An hour later Evan, pale and shivering, knocked softly at Sybil's door; Mrs. Lamotte appeared.

"How is Sybil, mother?"

"Quiet, but not rational. Doctor Heath has just gone. Evan, why! how badly you look!"

"I feel badly. I'm going to bed; good night, mother."

CHAPTER XXV.

THAT NIGHT.

At ten o'clock that night, business was running lively at the low-ceiled, dingy, riverside saloon that was most popular with the factory men, the colliers, the drovers, and the promiscuous roughs of W——, and that bears the dignified title of "Old Forty Rods."

The saloon is well patronised to-night. At the upper end, nearest the door, "Old Forty," in person, is passing liquors across the bar, and bawling orders to a nimble assistant, while every now and then he addresses a coarse jest to some one of the numerous loafers about the bar, mingling them strangely with his orders, and his calling of the drinks, as he passes them across the rail.

"Here's your beer, Lupin; Jack, half a dozen brandies for Mr. Burrill's party; Little, you are out on the brown horse—rum and water? Yes, sir, yes."

"Burrill's beastly high to-night," said a factory hand, setting down his beer-glass and wiping his mouth; "and the boys freeze to him since he handles old Lamotte's rocks."

"Of course, of course. Burrill don't forget old friends; Jack, bring the rum flask; they've been here a plum hour, them chaps, sir; 'ere's your punch, mister, and they keep the stuff runnin' down their throats, now I can tell you. Burrill foots the bill, of course; and they can do anything with that big chap when the wines get the upper hands of him. I'll be sworn, they're up to mischief to-night, for I see Rooney and Bob Giles—they delight in getting Burrill into scrapes—are drinking light, and plying him heavy," and "Forty" turned about to draw a glass of beer for a low-browed, roughly-dressed man who had just entered, and who was in fact none other than the tramp who had feasted by the roadside, on the day before, and whom Mr. Belknap had called Roake.

Roake drank his beer, and lounged over the bar for a short time, then called for a second glass, and after drinking it, went quietly out.

At the lower end of the long saloon, several tables are scattered, and gathered about one of these we see the party spoken of as "Mr. Burrill's."

Five men are grouped about the small table, and among these, John Burrill is conspicuous for being much better dressed, much louder in his laughter, and viler in his jests, and much drunker than are the other four.

Since his change of fortunes, these men have made capital of his weakness, and his purse has supplied their thirst, in return for which he has been fawned upon, and flattered, during the earlier stages of his intoxication, and made a tool and a jest later.

"I mus' go home," articulated Burrill, drawing forth and consulting a showy gold repeater. "Folks's sick er home; mus' be good; take er nother drink, boys?"

"Folks sick, eh?" queried Rooney, winking behind his hand at the others. "Wife, I 'spose?"

"Yes, wife I 'spose; wife 'n' brother-in-law, both sick; take er nother—"

"All right, old pard; but don't let a little sickness call you off so early; just let Heath take care of them; you're fond of Heath, too."

"Curse Heath!" roared out John Burrill; "what do you mean, I say, Roo-Roo-ney?"

"Burrill," said Bob Giles, setting down his glass and speaking in a low, confidential tone; "what's this power you have over Heath? Don't you know he's afraid of you?"

"He—he zer 'fraid er me! an' so he better be—him un—"

"And yet there are two or three of the fellows that say you are the one that's afraid."

"Me afraid! I—John Bur—ll, f-fraid. Boys, look, en I'll jus' tell you a s-secret. If I jus' opened my mouth, I could run that f-fellow out of the country; fact!" and he nodded sagaciously again and again.

"Then there ain't no truth in that story that you are the one that's afraid, and that you wouldn't dare go to Heath's office, not even if you wanted a doctor?"

"T-truth? By gad, sir, show me the man that says so; show 'im to me! By heavens, sir, I wouldn't be f-fraid to rout him him up the d-darkest night that ever blew, sir."

"Of course not, we don't doubt that, but—there's them do. I'll tell you what it is, Burrill, the thing would be settled if you would just walk up to the doctor's cottage, tell him you are sick somewhere, and bring away a prescription; that *would* settle it."

A murmur of approval went round the table. Not a man was there among them who would not rejoice inwardly at the discomfiture of the arrogant, would-be aristocrat, who, while he was less than their equal in many things, had risen above them in fortune. He had reached that period of drunkenness—and it took a vast quantity of stout liquor to bring him up to it—where his voice began to grow hoarse, his ready tongue to trip, his brain to be most completely muddled, and his legs to be most unreliable instruments of locomotion. The men about the table nodded and winked to each other, under his very nose.

"Egg him on, Rooney," whispered Giles, "let's have the fun out." And they did.

Ere long, John Burrill, staggering under the additional cargo of drinks imbibed as toasts to the undertaking, and again, as draughts of defiance to the enemy who would dare question his courage, buttoned his coat about him, and, boasting, cursing, and swaggering, reeled out into the night. Out into the night that swallowed him up forever.

"Let's follow him," said one of the plotters, starting up as the door closed behind him.

But this proposition met with no favour. The night was very dark, and the wind blowing in fierce gusts; the saloon was warm and inviting, and their victim had ordered their grog until he should return.

"Let's drink the good liquor he has paid for," said Rooney, with a wink, then we will let some more of the boys into the secret, and start out in a gang and gather him up. Heath will kick him out, sure enough, and if we follow too close we might be discovered. Not by Burrill, but by the doctor. We will bring Burrill back here, and two more drinks will make him tell the whole story."

They did not agree with Rooney on all points of his argument; but they had played a coarse practical joke upon a man who sometimes "took on airs" and vaunted himself as their patron; he who had been only their equal once. It was only a joke, a witless, mirthless, coarse, saloon joke, and they drank on and grew hilarious, never dreaming that they had sent one man to his grave and another to the foot of the scaffold.

As John Burrill came forth from the saloon and turned his face toward Doctor Heath's cottage, a lithe form emerged from amidst the darkness and paused for a moment just outside the saloon door, seeming to hesitate.

"He's goin' home, in course," muttered the man. "I'll jest light out and come in ahead." And he plunged down a by-street and went swiftly over the bridge; but not alone.

A second dark form had been lurking in the vicinity of "Old Forty's," the form of a boy, who glided through the dark, at the heels of the other, like a spirit.

"He is going wrong," thought this shadow discontentedly. "Somehow I'm sure of it; I'm shadowing the wrong party; but—I'm obeying instructions." And pursued and pursuer crossed the bridge and turned their steps toward Mapleton,

Meantime, John Burrill, reeling, singing snatches of low songs, and stopping sometimes to rest and assure himself that all the landmarks are there, pursues his way toward Doctor Heath's cottage.

It is situated on the outskirts of the town; the way is long, the night dark, the wind boisterous, and the way lonely. It is after ten o'clock.

Later—nearly two hours later, Frank Lamotte, driven by his demon of unrest, is pacing his room, feverish and fierce, when his door opens softly, a white haggard face looks in, a hoarse voice articulates, "Frank, for God's sake, for your own sake, come with me quick!"

Frank Lamotte turns swiftly, angrily. He is about to speak, when something catches his eye, fixes it in horror, and causes him to gasp out, pointing with one shaking finger:

"Ah-h-h; *what* is that?"

"It is the *Family Honour!*" came the hissing answer. "*Come*, I tell you."

And like a man in a nightmare, Frank Lamotte obeys.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PRINCE'S PREY.

THE morning of the following day breaks gray and dismal. The wind has been blowing all the night through, and wherever a tree

stands, there the fallen leaves lie, thick and rain-soaked; for it is raining, drizzling weather, and above, below, and around, all is gray, and dull, and dreary.

Dr. Heath's cottage stands aloof from all other dwellings, quite by itself, for the houses stand wide apart in this suburban portion of the town, and he has selected the pretty place because of its quiet beauty and comparative isolation. He has neighbours within sight, within hearing, too, should he choose to be vociferous; but the houses about him all stand within their own pleasant grounds. His nearest neighbour, on the one hand, has placed a fine orchard between them, and on the other hand, he has no neighbour at all; there is a vacant lot, well planted and pleasantly ruinous to see. A fine dwelling had once occupied the site, but fire had destroyed it, and the gaping cellar, a pile of burnt bricks, and some charred débris, are all that remain. In summer the place is one tangled growth of roses and flowering shrubs, and Doctor Heath makes free with the flowers in their season, and even swings his hammock among the old trees, that outnumber his own, and have outstripped them, too, in years and growth.

Opposite the doctor's cottage stands a handsome dwelling, far back among the trees. It is the home of Lawyer O'Meara and his wife; and the two are the doctor's firm friends.

Beyond the O'Meara dwelling and on the same side of the street stretches a row of cottages, built and owned by Mr. O'Meara. These are occupied by some thrifty mechanics, and one or two of the best of the mill workers. They are neat, new, tasteful, and well cared for by their tenants.

Clifford Heath awakes a little later than usual, this dismal gray morning; he had returned from his second visit to Sybil Burrill at a late hour, and after sitting beside his fire, pondering long over many things, had retired, to sleep soundly, and to wake late. What first rouses him is a knocking upon his door, a regular tattoo, beaten by his housekeeper, grown impatient over coffee too long brewed and muffins too brown.

He makes his toilet after a leisurely fashion, smiling a little at the vociferous barking of his dog, Prince.

The dog is always confined in the stable at night, where he is a safe companion and sure protection to the doctor's fine horse; and now, it being past the time when he is usually liberated, he is making his wrongs heard, and there will be no more repose or quiet until Prince is set free.

"Poor fellow," calls his master, as he swings open the stable door. "Poor Prince! Good, old boy! Come now, and you shall have a splendid breakfast, to compensate for my neglect."

The dog bounds out, a splendid bulldog, strong, fierce, and white as milk. He fawns upon his master, leaps about him, barks joyfully, and then follows obediently to the kitchen. The dog provided for, Doctor Heath goes in out of the rain, shaking the water from his coat, and tossing it aside in favour of a dry one; and then he applies himself to his own breakfast.

The warmth and comfort within are intensified by the dreariness without. Mrs. Gray has lighted a fire in the grate, and he turns toward it, sipping his coffee leisurely, enjoying the warmth all the more because of an occasional glance out of the window.

Two men pass—two of the cottagers—his neighbours, who, dismayed by the storm, have turned back toward their homes.

"Poor devils!" mutters the doctor, sympathetically; "they don't fancy laying brick and mixing mortar in weather like this; and one of them has no overcoat; I must keep that in mind, and supply him, if he will accept one, from out my store."

He stirs the fire briskly, takes another sip from his half emptied cup, and goes off in a reverie. Presently there comes the sound of a dog's angry barking, and soon mingled with the canine cries, the voices of men calling to one another, crying for aid. But so pleasant is his meditation, and so deep, that their sounds do not rouse him; they reach his ears, 'tis true; he has a vague sense of disagreeable sounds, but they do not break his reverie.

Something else does, however, a brisk hammering on the street door, and a loud, high-pitched voice, calling:

"Heath! Heath, I say!"

He starts up, shakes himself and his ideas together, and goes to face the intruder upon his meditations. It is his neighbour across the way.

"Heath, have you lost your ears? or your senses?" he cries, impatiently; "what the devil has your dog found, that has set these fellows in such a panic? Something's wrong; they want you to come and control the dog."

"Heath! Heath!" comes from the adjoin-

ing vacant lot; "come, for God's sake, quick!"

In another moment, Clifford Heath has seized his hat, and, followed by his neighbour, is out in the yard.

"Come this way, O'Meara," he says, quickly; "that is if you can leap the fence, it's not high," and he strides through his own grounds, scales the intervening palings, and in a few seconds is on the scene.

On the scene! At the edge of the old cellar, one of the men recently denominated "poor devils," by the musing doctor, is gesticulating violently, and urging him forward with lips that are pale with terror.

Down in the old cellar, the second man, paler still than the first, is making futile efforts to draw the dog away from something, at which he is clawing and tearing, barking furiously all the time.

Something lies under a heaped-up mass of leaves, grass, and freshly turned earth; something from which the fierce beast is tearing away the covering with rapid movements. As he leaps down into the cellar, Clifford Heath sees what it is that has so terrified the two men. From under the leaves and earth, Prince has brought to light a human foot and leg!

Instantly he springs forward, his hand upon the dog's collar, his face pale as ashes.

"Prince!" he cries; "Prince! come away, sir."

The dog crouches, quails for a moment, then utters a low growl, and tries to shake himself free; for the first time, he refuses to obey his master.

But it *is* his master; there is a short, sharp struggle, and then the brute cowers, whining at his feet.

"Wait!" he says, imperiously to the men, and then, speaking a stern word of command, he strides away, followed by the conquered and trembling brute.

It is the work of a moment to chain him fast; and then Clifford Heath goes swiftly back to the men, who stand very much as he left them.

"Can this be some trick?" Mr. O'Meara is saying, peering down from the edge of the cellar wall at the mound of earth and the protruding leg.

"There is no trick here," replies Clifford Heath, once more springing down into the cellar. "My dog would not be deceived. Come down here, O'Meara; this thing must be unearthed."

Mr. O'Meara lowers himself carefully down, and the man who has thus far stood sentinel follows suit. Then the four approach the mound once more. For a moment they regard each other silently; then one of the masons says:

"If we had a spade."

"Not yet," breaks in Lawyer O'Meara. "Let's make sure that we have found something before we cause any alarm to be given. Get some small boards; we do not want a spade."

The boards are found easily, and they look to O'Meara again, all but Clifford Heath, who stands near the mound gazing downward as if fascinated. While O'Meara speaks, he stoops swiftly, and then carries his hand to his pocket.

"Let's remove the—upper portion of whatever this is," says the lawyer nervously, "and work carefully. This looks like—"

"It looks like *murder*," says Clifford Heath, quietly. "Pull away the dirt, carefully, men."

They are all strong-nerved, courageous men; yet they are all very pale, as they bend to their task.

A few moments, and Mr. O'Meara utters a sharp exclamation, drops his board, and draws back. They have unearthed a shoulder, an arm, a clenched hand.

A moment more, and Clifford Heath, too, withdraws from his task, the cold sweat standing thick upon his temples. They are uncovering a head, a head that is shrouded with something white.

To Mr. O'Meara, to Clifford Heath, the moment is one of intense unmixed horror. To the men who still bend to their work, the horror has its mixture of curiosity. *Whose* is the face they are about to look upon?

Instinctively the two more refined men draw farther back, instinctively the others bend closer.

Swiftly they work. The last bit of earth is removed from the face; carefully they draw away a large white handkerchief, then utter a cry of horror.

"My God!" cries one, "it is *John Burrill*."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TURN IN THE GAME.

IT is John Burrill!

Lying there, half buried still, with clenched hands and features distorted. It is John Burrill, dead.

Clifford Heath utters a sharp exclamation. He starts forward suddenly, and looks, not upon the dead face, but straight at the white thing that is still held in the hand of one of the masons. Then he snatches it from the man fiercely, looks at it again and more closely, and lets it fall from his grasp. For a moment all is black to his vision, and over his face a ghastly pallor creeps. Slowly, slowly, he lifts his hand to his forehead, rests it there for a moment, and seems making an effort to think. Then he drops his hand; he lifts his head; he draws himself erect.

"O'Meara," he says, in a voice strangely hollow and unfamiliar, and pointing to the fallen handkerchief. "Look at that. I am going home; when you want me you will find me there." And without having so much as glanced at the dead face so near him, he goes slowly towards his cottage, holding his head proudly erect still.

Mr. O'Meara turns away from the corpse, and gazes for a moment after the retreating form of his friend; then he picks up the handkerchief; it is of softest linen, and across one corner he reads the embroidered name of *Clifford Heath*. For a moment he stands with the tell-tale thing held closely in his hand, and then he bends down, spreads it once more over the dead face, and turns to the men.

"This body must not be disturbed further," he says, authoritatively. "One of you go at once and notify Soames, and then Corliss. Fortunately, Soames lives quite near. Don't bring a gang here. Let's conduct this business decently and in order. Do you go, Bartlett," addressing the younger of the two men. "We will stay here until the mayor comes."

And Lawyer O'Meara buttons his coat tightly about him and draws closer to the cellar wall, the better to protect himself from the drip, drip, of the rain.

"It is a horrible thing, sir," ventured the mechanic, drawing further away from the ghastly thing outlined, and made more horrible by the wet, white covering. "It's a fearful deed for somebody, and—it looks as if the right man wasn't far away; we all know how he and Burrill were—"

"Hold your tongue, man," snapped O'Meara, testily, "keep 'what we all know' until you are called on to testify. *I* have something to think about."

And he does think, long and earnestly, regardless alike of the restless living companion and of the silent dead.

By and by, they come, the mayor, the officers, the curious gazers; the rain is nothing to them, in a case like this; there is much running to and fro; there are all the scenes and incidents attendant upon a first-class horror. A messenger is dispatched, in haste, to Mapleton, and, in the wind and the rain, the drama moves on.

The messenger to Mapleton rides in hot haste; he finds none but the servants astir in that stately house; to them he breaks the news, and then waits while they rouse Frank Lamotte; for Jasper Lamotte has not returned from the city.

After a time he comes down, pale and troubled of countenance; he can scarcely credit the news he hears; he is terribly shocked, speechless with the horror of the story told him.

By and by, he recovers his composure, in a measure; he goes to his mother's room, and tells her the horrible news; he orders the servants to be careful what they say in his sister's presence, and not to approach Evan's room; then he tells the coachman to meet Mr. Lamotte, who will come on the noon express, with the carriage. After which, he swallows a glass of brandy; and, without waiting for breakfast, mounts his horse and gallops madly townward.

Meantime, the fast express is steaming toward W——, bearing among its human freight, Mr. Jasper Lamotte; and never has W—— seen upon his usually serene face such a look as it now wears. It is harassed, baffled, discontented, surly. He knows no one among the passengers, and he sits aloof from his fellow travellers, making no effort to while away the time, as travellers do.

As they near W——, however, he shakes off his dullness, and lays aside his look of care; and when he steps upon the platform at W——, he is, to all appearance, the same smiling suave man, who went away three days before.

There are several other passengers for W——, among whom we may see a portly, dignified gentleman who looks to be somewhere in the forties, and who evidently has a

capital opinion of himself and knows what he is about. He is fashionably dressed, and wears a splendid diamond in his shirt front. He carries in his hand a small valise, and asks for a carriage to the best hotel.

Close behind him is another man of a different stripe. He is a rakish-looking fellow, dressed in smart but cheap clothing. He carries in his hand a small, square package, neatly strapped, and this alone would betray his calling, were it not so obvious in his look and manner. The "book fiend" has descended upon W——. He looks about him carelessly, watches the portly gentleman as he is driven away in the carriage from the W—— Hotel, sees Mr. Jasper Lamotte enter his landau, and drive swiftly away, and then he trudges cheerily townward, swinging his packet of books as he goes.

When they are out of sight of the gaping crowd about the depot, the coachman, acting under Frank's orders, brings his horses to a walk, and, turning upon his seat, addresses his master.

"I've dreadful news to tell you, sir; and Mr. Frank said to let you know it quick, so as you could come there at once."

Jasper Lamotte stares in angry astonishment, scarcely taking in the meaning of the none too lucid sentence.

"Well, sir," he says, shortly, "what are you talking about?"

This time the man came at once to the point.

"Mr. Burrill has been murdered, sir. They found him this morning in an old cellar, close by Dr. Heath's; and they say, sir—"

"*What!* what do you say? Burrill—"

"Murdered, sir—killed dead—stabbed right through the heart, sir. They are anxious for you to come. They are going to have an inquest right there."

"Drive there at once," cried Mr. Lamotte, hoarsely. "I must see for myself," and he sinks back upon his seat, pale and trembling.

Meantime the carriage containing the portly gentleman arrives at the hotel. The rain is still falling, and the gentleman steps hurriedly from the carriage and across the pavement—so hurriedly, indeed, that he jostles against a boy who is passing with a tray of ivory carvings and pretty scroll-work.

Down comes the tray, and the gentleman, who is evidently kind-hearted, cries out:

"Why, boy! Bless me, but I'm sorry! Didn't see you, upon my word. Pick your wares up, sonny, and take stock of the broken things, then come in and I'll make it all square. Just ask for Mr. Wedron, and don't be bashful," and he bustles into the office of the W—— House, where he calls for the best room they can give him, registers as "A. C. Wedron, att'y, N. Y.," and, asking that he might have dinner as early as possible, he goes at once to his room.

"I say," he calls to the porter who brings up his valise, "when that young image boy comes, just send him along to me; I owe him some damages."

A few minutes later, the boy enters the office and deposits his disordered tray upon a chair.

"Come along, you," calls the porter, gruffly. "The gentleman's looking for you."

"Wait a minit, can't ye?" retorts the boy coolly. "I jest want to take account of stock."

He drops on one knee and rearranges his tray with great care and no haste.

"There!" he exclaims, rising at length with a chuckle of satisfaction. "I reckon that big bloke'll be about two fifty out after I call." And he takes up his tray and says to the porter: "Now, then, give us the address."

"Twenty-one," he replies, and the boy ascends the stairs, and unceremoniously opens the door of twenty-one.

The gentleman, who stands by the window, turns quickly at the sound of the opening door, and when it has closed behind the boy, he advances and asks in a low tone:

"How lies the land, George? Is there any news?"

"I'm sorry, sir," replies the boy. "I was faithful to orders—but things have gone wrong."

"How, my boy?"

"The man you call Burrill was murdered last night."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir, and I *might* have known who did it. This is the way it went, sir: I kept an eye upon all your men as well as I could, during the day, and kept the widest eye on the short fellow with the tramp lay-out and the ugly face. That was easy, for he lay low all day; so I managed to get around here two or three times during the afternoon, and I found that Mr. Belknap was laying low, too. He staid in and about the hotel all day, and, I think, all the evening. At night the tramp fellow began to show signs of life, and I

piped him close. Early in the evening, at dusk, in fact, he went over the river and out toward Mapleton; on the way he met Burrill coming to town, and he faced about and stalked him back. Burrill lounged about a good bit, and then he went to the saloon you showed me; some fellows were waiting there for him, and they got about a table and carried things high, drinking every five minutes. My man kept a close look on the saloon, and seemed uneasy all the time; once he went in, and drank two beers, but he did not venture near Burrill and his party. By and by, I think it must have been ten o'clock or later, Burrill came out from the saloon alone; he was very drunk, and staggered as he walked away. He turned south, and my man came out, as I supposed, to follow. But, instead, he took a short cut to the bridge and crossed over, hiding himself in the low hedge on the other side. He staid there until almost morning, and then he seemed to be disgusted, or discouraged, or both. I staid close by, and tracked him back to his roost! Then I turned in to get a little rest myself. I was out early, and looked first after my man; he was out too, prowling about uneasily. He went to the saloon, and seemed inclined to loaf about there a bit; so I went to look after Mr. Belknap. He was not visible, and so I lounged about, as it was too wet to get out my wares. Well, it was not long before my man came out from 'Old Forty Rods,' and started out on the south road, and I kept on behind him, and before we had gone far we met a party of excited men, gathered about the mayor's house, and learned that a murder had been committed. We fell in with the crowd, and went out to the place where the body lay. It was in an empty lot, right next to Doctor Heath's cottage; the body was down in an old cellar, and had been hastily buried by the murderers. They say it was Doctor Heath's dog that first discovered the body."

He pauses, and waits for a comment, but none comes; the gentleman stands with his hands behind him, and head bent, as if still listening. For a long time, he stands thus, and then takes a turn or two about the room.

"Why, George," he says, at last. "I don't see that you could have done better. It was no part of our plan to have this murder happen, and it bids fair to make us some trouble that we had not counted on. But we are used to that, George. So you think you might have known who did the deed?"

"I might, sir, if I had followed Burrill; I felt all the time that he was the man to watch."

"Oh!" with an odd smile; "your instincts are on the alert. However, you did right in disregarding instinct, and obeying orders. Now then, be off, sir, and until you have further notice, keep both your eyes on Mr. Belknap. By the by, when do they hold an inquest?"

"At three o'clock, sir; they want to have Mr. Lamotte there."

"Well! that's all, George; you had better dispose of your traps for the day, and look sharp after Mr. Belknap."

"All right, sir;" and taking up his tray, the little detective goes out, dropping back into his old impudent manner, as the door closes behind him.

"So Burrill has been killed," soliloquizes the portly gentleman seating himself before his cheery fire. "Well, that goes to show that we detectives don't find out all the tangles. We are lucky oftener than we are shrewd. Now look, I fancied I had the game in my hands, and stepped into town this morning to throw my trump and win, and now, my game is blocked, and a new one opens against me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

INTRODUCING MR. SMITH.

ALL that long morning Clifford Heath sat alone in his cosy parlour, and what his thoughts were, no observer, had there been such, could have guessed. His features were grave, even stern, but there was no apprehension, no expectancy, no fear: nothing but calm gravity and inflexible haughtiness could be discerned in the face that was sometimes bent over a favourite book, sometimes submerged in clouds of smoke from his big German meerschaum, but that never once turned toward the window that overlooked the scene of the morning's discovery. All day the sounds from thence penetrated to his ear; all day men were coming and going, with much loud talk as they passed his doorway, and much bustle and excitement. But Clifford Heath might have been deaf and blind, so little interest did he manifest in the sights and sounds that were attendant upon

the scene of John Burrill's low, rain-soaked bed of death.

Crouched at his feet lay the great dog Prince, who had been comforted by his master for any harshness that he had suffered necessarily, and he now lay watchful, but quiet, seeming to share, in a measure, the mood of his master and best friend.

At one o'clock Mrs. Gray came in and spread his luncheon beside him in tempting array, and the doctor laid aside his pipe, and, favouring Mrs. Gray with one of those kindly smiles that she always melted under to the extent of admitting to herself that her master *was* "a man who *meant well*, in spite of his horrid ways."

Then he drew his chair up beside the lunch table, and immediately set Mrs. Gray's good humour awry by indulging in one of his "horrid ways," namely, the tossing of dainty bits to Prince, who caught them in his mouth with much adroitness and without quitting his position upon the Turkish rug.

Finally, when Prince had received his share of Mrs. Gray's dainties, the doctor fell upon the rest and made a hearty meal.

As he was washing down a tart with a large tumbler of claret, there came a knock at the street door, and without a moment's hesitation —indeed, with some alacrity—he rose to answer it in person.

Once more it was his neighbour, O'Meara.

"Come in O'Meara," said he, coolly. "I'm just finishing luncheon," and he led the way back to the parlour.

"I just looked in for a moment in my capacity of friend and neighbour, Heath," said the little lawyer, briskly, at the same time seating himself near the table. "Later on I may give you a call in my professional capacity, but not now, not now, sir."

"Don't do it at all, O'Meara," said the doctor, with a short laugh; "I have no earthly use for a lawyer."

"No more have I for a medical adviser just this minute, sir; but I may need one before night."

"And before night I may need a lawyer, O'Meara—is that it?"

The little man shook his head.

"I'm afraid of it, Heath; I'm afraid of it, as things look now."

"And things look now very much as they did this morning, I suppose?"

O'Meara nodded.

"Then, this is the prospect ahead—a coroner's verdict thus: 'Deceased came to his death at the hands of Clifford Heath, M.D.;' and circumstantial evidence thus: 'Deceased has on several occasions been threatened by the accused; he was found buried near the premises of accused, and upon his person was found a handkerchief bearing the name, Clifford Heath.' This, and how much more I can't tell. It's a beautiful case, O'Meara."

The little lawyer stared, astonished at his coolness.

"Don't underrate this business, Heath," he said, anxiously. "I'm glad to see that it has not had the opposite effect on you. I'm glad to see plenty of pluck, but—"

"But there's a strong case against me; that's what you would say, O'Meara. I don't doubt, and let me tell you that neither you nor I can guess *how* strong the case is; not yet."

"Such an affair is bad enough, at the best, Heath; I don't see anything in the case, thus far, that will hold up against an impartial investigation; as for other evidence, am I to understand—"

Clifford Heath bent forward, and lifted one hand warningly.

"Understand nothing for the present, O'Meara; after the verdict come to me, not as a lawyer, but as a friend, and I will explain my language and—attitude; for the present I have nothing to say."

"Then I must be satisfied with what you *have* said," replied the lawyer cheerfully. "Of course you will be at the inquest?"

The doctor nodded.

"Well, having seen—and heard you, it is not necessary to offer any suggestions, I see that," and the lawyer arose and took up his hat, "and it won't be policy for me to remain here too long. Count on me Heath, in any emergency. I'm your man."

"Thank you, O'Meara; rest assured such friendship is fully appreciated." And he extended his hand to the friendly lawyer, who grasped it silently, seemed struggling, either to speak or to repress some thought, and then dropped it and went out silently, followed in equal silence by his host, who closed the door behind him, and then went thoughtfully back to his claret.

"Zounds!" muttered Lawyer O'Meara, picking his way back across the muddy street, and entering his own dwelling. "To think of accusing a man of so much coolness and presence of mind, of such a bungling piece of work as this. It's a queer suspicion, but I

could almost swear that Heath smells a plot."

At this moment a carriage drove hastily by, all mud bespattered, and lying open in defiance of the rain.

"It's Lamotte's landau," said the lawyer, peeping out from the shelter of his verandah; "it's Lamotte's carriage, and it's Lamotte himself; I would like to see how he looks, just for one moment; but it's too wet, and I must go tell the old woman how her favourite doctor faces the situation."

A few moments after the landau had deposited Jasper Lamotte at the gate of the vacant lot, a pedestrian, striding swiftly along, as if eager to be upon the scene and sate his curiosity, came in among the group of men that, all day long, had hovered about the cellar.

"What's a going on here?" he demanded of the first man upon whom his glance fell, "an—accident?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the man, who was one of Old Forty Rod's customers; "where have *you* come from that you don't know a man has been killed!"

"Killed!"

"Yes, murdered! stabbed last night and buried in this old cellar."

"Heavens, man! was—was he a citizen?"

"Well, I should say! and a rum chap, too. Why, you are a stranger to these parts if you don't know John Burrill."

"Never heard of him in my life, old Top," replied the stranger. "I *don't* live in these parts."

The man drew back a little, and seeing this, the stranger came closer and laid one hand familiarly upon his arm, at the same time leaning nearer, and saying in a loud whisper:

"Any of the stiff's friends in this gang?"

The satellite of "Old Forty," who had at first seemed somewhat disposed to resent too much familiarity on the part of the stranger, turned toward him, drew closer, and allowed his features to relax into a grin of friendliness. He had not been so fortunate as to receive a morning dram, and the breath of the stranger had wafted to his nostrils the beloved, delicious odour of "whisky killers."

"Hush!" he whispered confidentially, "that man over there, the tall, good-looking one with the whiskers, d'ye mind—"

"Yes, yes! high-toned bloke?"

"Exactly; that's the dead man's father-in-law."

"Father-in-law, eh!"

"Yes, and that young chap beside him, the pale, handsome one, that's his son."

"Whose son?"

"The tall man's son; Frank Lamotte's his name."

"You don't say; good-looking duffer! Found the assassin?"

"Not exactly, but they say—"

"Look here, pard, this sniffs of romance; now I'm gone on romance in real life; just let's step back among these cedars, and out of the crowd, where I can give you a pull at my brandy flask, and you can tell me all the particulars."

And the jaunty young man tapped his breast suggestively and winked knowingly down at his new found friend.

"Agreed," said the man eagerly, and turning at once toward the nearest clump of trees.

"I may as well say my name is Smith," said the stranger, as he passed over his brandy flask. "Now then, pard, fire ahead, and don't forget when you get thirsty to notify Smith, the book peddler."

The man began his story, and the book peddler stood with ear attentive to the tale, and eye fixed upon Jasper Lamotte.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OPENLY ACCUSED.

It is three o'clock. The rain has ceased falling, but the sky is still gray and threatening. The wind howls dismally among the old trees that surround John Burrill's shallow grave, and its weird wail, combined with the rattle and creak of the branches, and the drip, drip of water, dropping from the many crevices into the old cellar, unite to form a fitting requiem for an occasion so strange and uncanny.

Down in the cellar, standing ankle deep in mud and slime, are the "good men and true," who have been summoned by Justice, to decide upon the manner in which John Burrill met his death. There, too, is the mayor, dignified, grave, and important. The officers of the law are there, and close behind the coroner stand the Lamottes, father and son. A little farther back are grouped the witnesses. Those of the morning, the two masons, Mr. O'Meara, Dr. Heath—they are all there except the first and surest one,

Prince. There are the men who were Burrill's companions of the night before, reluctant witnesses ferreted out through the officiousness of one of the saloon habitues, and fearing, a little, to relate their part in the evening's programme, each eager to lighten his own burden of the responsibility at the expense of his comrades in the plot. There are three women and one man, all eye-witnesses to the first meeting of John Burrill and Doctor Heath in Nance Burrill's cottage, and there is Nance Burrill herself. The women stand a little aloof, upon a few boards that have been thrown carelessly down for their comfort. And Nance Burrill talks loudly, and cries as bitterly as if the dead man had been her life's comfort, not its curse.

And there, too, is Raymond Vandyck. He stands aloof from them all, stands near the ghastly thing that once, not long ago, came between him and all his happiness. There is a strange look in his blue eyes, as they rest upon the lifeless form, from which the coverings have been removed, but which still lies in the shallow place scooped out for it by the hands that struck it from among the living. Under the eyes of them all the dirt has been removed from the broad breast, and two gaping wounds are disclosed; cuts deep and wide, are made with some broad, heavy weapon, of the dagger species.

When they have all, in turn, examined the body, as it lies, it is lifted out carefully, and placed upon a litter, in the midst of the group, and then all turn their eyes from the shallow grave to the new resting-place of its late occupant.

Not all; Raymond Vandyck, still gazing as if fascinated by that hollowed-out bit of earth, starts forward suddenly, then draws shudderingly back, and points to something that lies almost imbedded in the soft soil. Somebody comes forward, examines, and then draws from out the grave, where it has lain, directly under the body, a knife—a knife of peculiar shape and workmanship—a long, keen, *surgeon's knife!* There are dark stains upon the blade and handle; and a murmur of horror runs through the crowd as it is held aloft to their view.

Raymond Vandyck draws instinctively away from the grave now, and from the man who still holds the knife; and in doing so he comes nearer the group of women, and catches a sentence that falls from the lips of Nance Burrill.

Suddenly his face flames into anger, and he strides across to where Mr. O'Meara stands.

"O'Meara, what is this that I hear: have they dared accuse Heath?"

"Don't you know, Vandyck?"

"No; I have heard nothing, save the fact of the murder; the coroner's summons found me at home."

"Heath will be accused, I think."

Raymond Vandyck turns and goes over to Clifford Heath; without uttering a word, he links his arm within that of the suspected man, and standing thus, listens to the opening of the trial.

The only sign of recognition he receives is a slight pressure of the arm upon which his hand rests; but before Clifford Heath's eyes, just for the moment, there swims a suspicious moisture.

Above them, crowding close about the cellar walls, is a motley throng, curious, eager, expectant; among the faces peering down may be seen that of the portly gentleman; his diamond pin glistening as he turns this way and that; his great coat blown back by the gusts of wind, and a natty umbrella clutched firmly in his plump, gloved hand. Not far distant is private detective Belknap, looking as curious as any, and still nearer the cellar's edge is the rakish book-peddler, supported by his now admiring friend of the morning, who has warmed into a hearty interest in "that fine young fellow, Smith," under the exhilarating influence of the "fine young fellow's" brandy flask.

Dodging about among the spectators, too, is the boy George, who has abandoned his tray of pretty wares, and is making his holiday a feast of horrors.

And now all ears are strained to hear the statements of the various witnesses in this strange case.

Frank Lamotte is the first. He is pale and nervous, and he avoids the eyes of all save the ones whom he addressess. Doctor Heath keeps two steady, searching orbs fixed upon his face, but can draw to himself no responsive glance. Frank testifies as follows:

John Burrill had left Mapleton the evening before at an early hour, not later than eight o'clock. Witness had seen little of him during the day. Deceased was in a state of semi-intoxication when last he saw him. That was at six o'clock, or near that time. No, he did not know the destination of deceased. They

seldom went out together. Did not know if Burrill had any enemies. Was not much in his confidence.

Upon being questioned closer, he displays some unwillingness to answer, but finally admits that he *has* heard Burrill speak in bitter terms of Doctor Heath, seeming to know something concerning the doctor's past life that he, Heath, wished to conceal.

What was the nature of the knowledge?"

That he cannot tell.

Jasper Lamotte is called. He has been absent from home, and can throw no light upon the subject.

The two masons, one after the other, testify; their statements do not vary.

They were returning home, having turned back from their day's labour, because of the rain. When they came near the old cellar, the barking of a dog attracted their attention. It came from the cellar, and one of them, curious to see what the dog had hunted down, went to look. The dog was tugging at what appeared to be a human foot. He called his companion, and then leaped down into the cellar, and tried to drive the dog from what he now feared was a half-buried human being. The other man called for help, and, seeing O'Meara, shouted to him to tell Heath to come and call off his dog.

They tell it all. How Doctor Heath came and mastered the dog, after a hard struggle; how the face of the dead was uncovered, and Doctor Heath had snatched at the white thing they had taken from off it, scrutinised it for a moment, and then flung it from him. They repeat his words to Mr. O'Meara with telling effect; and then they stand aside.

Doctor Heath is sworn. He has nothing to say that has not been said. He knows nothing of the murdered man, save that he once knocked him down for beating a woman, and once for insulting himself.

Had he ever threatened deceased? He believed that he had on the occasion last mentioned. What was the precise language used? That he could not recall.

Then the handkerchief is produced, is presented to him.

"Doctor Heath, is that yours?" Every man holds his breath; every man is visibly agitated; every man save the witness.

Coolly lifted his hand to his breast pocket, he draws from thence a folded handkerchief; he shakes out the snowy square, and offers it to the coroner.

"It is mine or an exact counterpart of mine. Your honour can compare them."

Astonishment sits on every face. What matchless coolness! what a splendid display of conscious innocence or of cool effrontery!

The coroner examines the two pieces of linen long and closely, then he passes them to one of the jurymen; and they go from hand to hand; and all the while Clifford Heath stands watching the scrutiny. Not eagerly, not even with interest, rather with a bored look, as if he must see something, and with every feature locked in impenetrable calm.

Finally the coroner receives them back. They are precisely alike, and so says his honour:

"Clifford Heath, do you believe this handkerchief, which I hold in my hand, and which was recently found upon the face of this dead man, to be, or have been, yours?"

"I do," calmly.

"Are you aware that you have recently lost such a handkerchief?"

"I am not."

"Has such a one been stolen from you?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then you have no idea how your property came where it was this morning found?"

"You are seeking facts, sir, not ideas."

A moment's silence; the coroner takes up the knife.

"Doctor Heath, will you look at this knife."

The doctor steps promptly forward and receives it from his hand.

"Did you ever see that knife before?"

"I can't say sir," turning it carelessly in his hands, and examining the spots upon the blade.

"Did you ever see one like it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you ever own one like it?"

"I *do* own one like it."

"Are such knives common?"

"They are—to the surgical profession."

"Do you own more than one knife of this sort?"

"I do not."

"Did you ever own more than one like this?"

"Not at the same time,"

"Then you have lost a knife like this?"

"No; but I have broken two."

"When did you last see deceased alive?"

"Not since our encounter on the street; that was a week ago, I should think, perhaps longer."

"Who witnessed that affair?"

"Mr. Vandyck was with me; the others were strangers."

"That is all, Doctor Heath."

Lawyer O'Meara comes next; his testimony is brief, and impatiently given. He adds nothing new to the collected evidence.

Next comes the man Rooney, and he rehearses the scene at "Old Forty Rods," sparing himself as much as possible.

"We didn't really think he'd go to Doctor Heath's," he says in conclusion. "We all called it a capital joke, and agreed to go out and look him up after a little. He was reeling drunk when he went out, and we all expected to find him floored on the way. After a while, an hour, perhaps, we started out, half a dozen of us with a lantern, and went along the road he had taken; we went almost to Heath's cottage, looking all about the road as we went. When we did not find him, we concluded that he had gone straight home, and that if we staid out longer the laugh would be on us. So we went back, and agreed to say nothing about the matter to Burrill when we should see him."

"How near did you come to Doctor Heath's house?"

"Very near, sir; almost as near as we are now."

"But you were in the opposite direction."

"Just so, sir; we came from the town."

"Did you hear any movements; any sounds of any sort?"

"Nothing particular, sir; we were making some noise ourselves."

"Did you meet any one, either going or coming!"

"No, sir; but a man might easily have passed us in the dark on the other side of the road."

Five men confirm Rooney's statement, and every word weighs like lead against Clifford Heath.

John Burrill left the saloon to go to Doctor Heath's house; in drunken bravado, he would go at night to disturb and annoy the man who had, twice, in public, chastised him, and on both occasions uttered a threat and a warning; unheeding these, he had gone to brave the man who had warned him against an approach —and he has never been seen alive since; he has been found dead, murdered, hidden away near the house of the man who had said: "If he ever should cross my path, rest assured I shall know how to dispose of him."

These words, distinctly remembered by all three of the women who witnessed the rescue in Nance Burrill's house, are repeated by each one in turn, and the entire scene is rehearsed.

Nance Burrill is called upon, and just as she comes forward, Mr. Lamotte beckons the coroner, and whispers a few words in his ear. The coroner nods, and returns to his place. Nance Burrill is sworn, and all listen eagerly, expecting to hear her rehearse the story of her life as connected with that of the dead man. But all are doomed to disappointment. She tells the story of the rescue in her cottage, much as did the others; she repeats the words of Clifford Heath, as did the others, and she turns back to her friends, leaving the case against the man who had been her champion darker than before.

Raymond Vandyck is called; he does not stir from his position beside his friend, and his face wears a look of defiant stubbornness.

"Ray," says Clifford Heath, quietly, "your silence would be construed against me; go forward and tell the whole truth."

Then he obeys the summons; but the truth has to be drawn from him by hard labour; he will not help them to a single fact. For example: "What do you know concerning this case?"

"Nothing," he says, shortly.

"Did you know that man," pointing to the body of Burrill, "in his life?"

"I had not that honor."

"Ah—you have seen him?"

"I believe so," indifferently.

"You can't swear to the fact, then?"

"I knew him better by reputation than by sight."

The coroner wiggled, uneasily.

"You are a friend to Dr. Heath?"

"I am," promptly.

"Please relate what you know of his—difference with Mr. Burrill."

"What I—*know?*"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, I don't exactly *know* anything."

"Why, sir, did you not witness a meeting between the two?"

"I—suppose so."

"You suppose!"

"Well, I can't *swear* that the man I saw knocked down, if that is what you mean, was Burrill; it was night, and I did not see his face clearly."

"You believed it to be Burrill?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Heath so believed?"

"I don't know."

More uneasiness on the part of the coroner.

"Please state what Doctor Heath said to the man he knocked down."

"Well, I can't repeat the exact words. He said what any one would have said under the circumstances."

"Ah! what were the circumstances?"

"The fellow was half drunk. He approached Dr. Heath in a coarse and offensive manner."

"Was his language offensive?"

"I didn't hear what he said."

"Did you hear what Dr. Heath said?"

"I did."

"You heard it distinctly?"

"Quite."

"Ah!" smiling triumphantly. "Then you *can* give us his words?"

"Not *verbatim*."

"Give us his meaning, then."

"His meaning, as nearly as I could understand it, was this: He would allow no man to insult him or to meddle with his affairs, and he finished with something like this: 'Keep my name off your lips, wherever you are, if you want whole bones in your skin.'"

"He said that?"

"Well, something like that; I may have put it too strong."

"Do you remember what Dr. Heath said by way of comment on the affair?"

"One of the men picked the fellow by the sleeve, and said, 'Come out of that, Burrill!' and then Heath turned to me and asked, 'Who the deuce is Burrill?'"

"And your reply?"

"I said"—stopping a moment and turning his eyes upon the two Lamottes—"I said, 'He is Jasper Lamotte's son-in-law.'"

"And then, sir?"

"Then Dr. Heath made about the same sort of comment others have made before him—something to the effect that Mr. Lamotte had made a very remarkable choice."

"Mr. Vandyck," says the coroner severely, "it seems to me that your memory is singularly lucid on some points, and deficient on others of more importance."

"That's a fact, sir," with cheerful humility. "I'm always that way."

"Ah!" with an excess of dignity. "Mr. Vandyck, I won't tax your memory further."

Ray turns away, looking as if, having done his duty, he might even survive the coroner's frown, and as he moves again to the side of the suspected man, some one in the audience above, a portly gentleman, with a diamond shining on his immaculate breast, makes this mental comment: "There is a witness who has withheld more than he has told." And he registers the name of Raymond Vandyck upon his memory.

This is the last witness.

While the jurymen stand aside to deliberate, there is a buzz and murmur among the people up above, and profound quiet below. Attention is divided between the gentlemen of the jury and Clifford Heath. The former are very much agitated. They look troubled, uneasy, and uncomfortable. They gesticulate rapidly and with a variety of movements that would be ludicrous were the occasion less solemn, the issue less than a man's life and honour.

Finally the verdict is reached, and is pronounced:

The coroner's jury "find, after due deliberation, that John Burrill came to his death by two dagger, or knife strokes from the hand of Dr. Clifford Heath."

The accused, who, during the entire scene, has stood as immovable as the sphynx, and has not once been startled, disturbed, or surprised from his calm by anything that has been brought forward by the numerous witnesses, lifts his head proudly; lifts his hat, too, with a courtly gesture, to the gentlemen of the jury, that may mean total exoneration from blame, so far as they are concerned, or a haughty defiance, and then, after one sweeping glance around the assembly, a glance which turns for an instant upon the faces of the Lamottes, he beckons to the constable; beckons with a gesture that is obeyed as if it were a command.

"Corliss," he says, just as he would say—"give the patient a hot drink and two powders." "Corliss, I suppose you won't want to lose sight of me, since I have suddenly become public property. Come with me, if you please; I am going home; then—I am at *your* service."

And without more words, without let or hindrance, without so much as a murmur of disapproval, he lifts himself out of the cellar, and walks, at a moderate pace, and with firm aspect, towards his cottage, closely followed by Corliss, who looks, for the first time in his official career, as if he would gladly be a simple private citizen at that moment.

The coroner's inquest is over; there remains now nothing save to remove the body to a more suitable resting-place, and to disperse,

Jasper Lamotte moves about, giving short orders in a low tone. He is pallid and visibly nervous. If it were his own son who lay there in their midst, stiff and cold, and saturated with his own blood, he could scarcely appear more agitated, more shocked and sorrowful. He is really shocked; really sorry; he actually regrets the loss of this man, who must have been a constant crucifixion to his pride.

This is what they whisper among themselves, as they gather in knots and furtively watch him, as he moves about the bier.

It has been a shock to Frank Lamotte, too, although he never had seemed to crave the society of his brother-in-law, and always turned away from any mention of his name, with a sneer.

Two men, who withdraw quickly from the crowd, are Lawyer O'Meara and Ray Vandyck. As they come up out of the cellar and go out from the hateful place, Ray breaks into bitter invective; but O'Meara lays a firm hand upon his arm.

"Hold your impulsive tongue, you young scamp! Do you want to be impeached for a prejudiced witness? You want to help Heath, not to hurt him; and let me tell you, he will need strong friends and shrewd helpers, before we see him a free man again."

Ray grinds out something profane, and then paces on in wrathful silence.

"You are right, of course," he says, after a moment's pause, and in a calmer tone. "But, good God! to bring such a charge against Heath, of all men! O'Meara," suddenly, "you must defend him."

"I intend to," grimly. "And in his interest I want to see you as soon as the vicinity is quiet; we must think the matter over and then see Heath."

"Heath puzzles me; he's strangely apathetic."

"He'll puzzle you more yet, I'm thinking. I half think he knows who did the deed, and don't intend to tell." He pauses, having come to the place where their ways diverge. "Come around by dark, Vandyck, we can't lose any time, that is if the buzzards are out of the way."

"The buzzards will follow the carrion," scornfully. "I'll be on hand, Mr. O'Meara."

He goes on, looking longingly at Clifford Heath's cottage, as he passes the gate, and the little lawyer begins to pick his way across the muddy street, not caring to go on to the proper crossing.

"Mr. O'Meara."

He turns nervously, to encounter the gaze of a large gentleman with a rosy face, curling, iron-gray hair and beard, and a blazing diamond in his shirt front.

"Eh! sir; you addressed me?"

"I did," replies the gentleman, in a low, energetic tone, strangely at variance with his general appearance, at the same time coming close and grasping the lawyer's hand with great show of cordiality, and before the astounded little man can realise what he is about. "Call me Wedron, sir, Wedron, ahem, of the New York Bar. I must have an interview with you, sir, and at once."

O'Meara draws back and replies rather frigidly:

"I am glad to know you, sir; but if your business is not too urgent—if another time will do—"

"Another time will *not* do; my business concerns Clifford Heath."

"Then, sir, I am at your service."

CHAPTER XXX.

AN OBSTINATE CLIENT.

"THERE, sir; I think we understand each other, sir."

"Humph! well, that's according to how you put it. My knowledge is sufficient unto the day, at any rate. I am to visit Heath at once, taking young Vandyck with me; I am to insist upon his making a strong defence, and to watch him closely. Vandyck is to add his voice, and he'll do it with a roar, and then we are to report to you. Is that it?"

"Exactly."

The speakers are Lawyer O'Meara and "Mr. Wedron, of the New York Bar." For more than an hour they have been seated in the lawyer's study, conversing in low, earnest tones; and during this interval, O'Meara's valuation of his *vis-à-vis* has evidently "taken a rise," and stands now at a high premium. His spirits have risen, too; he views the case of Clifford Heath through a new lens; evidently he recognises, in the man before him, a strong ally.

It is arranged that, for the present, Mr. Wedron shall retain his room at the hotel, but shall pass the most of his time with the O'Mearas, and the uninitiated are to fancy him an old friend, as well as a brother practitioner. Even Mrs. O'Meara is obliged to accept this

version, while inwardly wondering that she has never heard her husband mention his friend, "Wedron, of the New York Bar."

Evidently they trust each other, these two men; as O'Meara has just said, their mutual understanding is sufficient unto the hour. Therefore, it being already sunset, they go together to the parlour, and are soon seated, in company with Mrs. O'Meara, about a cosy tea-table.

"It is best that Vandyck should not see me here until after your interview with Heath," Mr. Wedron has said to the little lawyer; therefore when, a little later, Ray puts in an appearance, he sees only O'Meara, and is immediately hurried away toward the county jail.

They find Corliss at the sheriff's desk, his superior officer having been for several days absent from the town. The constable looks relieved and fatigued. He believes that within the hour he, single handed, has conveyed into safe custody one of the most ferocious assassins of his time; and, having gained so signal a victory, he now feels inclined to take upon himself airs, and he hesitates, becomingly, over O'Meara's civilly worded request to be shown to the cell assigned Doctor Heath.

But O'Meara, who possesses all the brusqueness of the average Yankee lawyer, has no mind to argue the case.

"I don't know, sir," says Corliss, with some pomposity. "Really I consider Heath a very unsafe prisoner, and—"

"The deuce you do," breaks in the impatient lawyer. "Well, I'll promise that *Doctor* Heath shan't damage you any, so just trot ahead with your keys, and don't parley. *My* time is worth something."

Corliss slips down from his stool and looks at Ray.

"But Mr. Vandyck, sir?" he begins.

"Mr. Vandyck will see Doctor Heath too, sir," interrupts Ray, with much decision. "And you won't find it to your interest, Corliss, to hunt up too many scruples."

It filters into the head of the constable that the wealthiest and most popular of W——'s lawyers, and the bondsman and firm friend of the absent sheriff, are hardly the men to baffle, and so, for the safety of his own official head, he takes his keys and conducts them to Doctor Heath.

The jail is new and clean and comfortable, more than can be said of many in our land, and the prison has a cell that is fairly lighted, and not constructed on the suffocation plan.

They find him sitting by his small table, his head resting upon his hand, his eyes fixed upon the floor, seemingly lost in thought. Evidently he is glad to see his visitors, for a smile breaks over his face as he rises to greet them.

It is not a time for commonplaces, and O'Meara, who sees that time is of value, is in no mood for a prologue to his task; so he begins at the right place.

"Heath, I'm sorry enough that you, almost a stranger among us, should be singled out as a victim in this case. It don't speak well for the judgment of our citizens. However, we are bound to set you right, and I've come to say that I shall esteem it a privilege to defend you—that is, if you have not a more able friend to depend upon."

The prisoner smiles as he replies:

"You are very good, O'Meara, and you are the man I should choose to defend me; but—you will have to build your case; I can't make one for you, and—you heard the evidence."

"Hang the evidence!" cries the lawyer, drawing from his pocket a small note book.

"We'll settle their evidence; just you give me a few items of information, and then I will let Vandyck talk; he wants to, terribly."

The prisoner turns slowly in his chair, and looks steadfastly first at one, then at the other, and then he says:

"Do you really believe, O'Meara, that I had no hand in this murder?"

"I do," emphatically.

"And you, Ray?"

"I! You deserve to be kicked for asking. I'll tell *just* what I *think*, a little later; I know you didn't kill Burrill."

Clifford Heath withdraws his gaze from the faces of his visitors, and seems to hesitate; then he says slowly:

"I am deeply grateful for your confidence in me; but I fear my actions must belie my words. My friends, the evidence is more than I can combat. I can't prove an *alibi;* and there's no other way to clear myself."

"Bah!" retorts O'Meara; "there are several ways. Let us take the ground that you are innocent; there must then be some one upon whom to fasten the guilt. You have an enemy; some one has stolen your handkerchief and knife. Who is that enemy? Whom do you suspect?"

The prisoner shook his head. "I shall accuse no one," he said, briefly.

"What!" burst out Ray Vandyck; "you will not hunt down your enemy? This is too much! Heath, I believe you could put your hand on the assassin."

No reply from the prisoner; he sits with his head bowed upon his hand, a look of dogged resolution upon his face.

"Vandyck," says the little lawyer, who has been gazing fixedly at his obstinate client, and who now turns two keen eyes upon the excited Ray; "keep cool! keep cool, my lad! Heath, look here, sir, I'm bound to defend your case—do you object to that?"

"On the contrary, O'Meara, you are my only hope; but, your success must depend upon you own shrewdness. I can't give you any help."

Down went something in the lawyer's note book.

"That means you won't give me any help," writing briskly.

"It's an ungracious way of putting it," smiling slightly; "but—that's about the way it stands."

"Just so," writing still; "you believe the handkerchief to have been yours?"

"Yes."

"And the knife?"

"Yes. Stay, send Corliss with some one else, to my office; let them examine my case of instruments, and see if the knife is among them; this, for form's sake."

"It shall be attended to—for form's sake. Heath, who beside yourself had access to your office?"

"My office was insecurely locked; any one might easily force an entrance, and a common key would open my door."

Scratch, scratch; the lawyer seems not to notice the doctor's evasion of the question.

"Ahem! As your lawyer, Heath, is there any truth in these stories about a previous knowledge of Burrill?"

"Do you mean *my* previous knowledge of the man?"

"Yes."

"I never knew the fellow; never saw him until I knocked him down in his first wife's defence."

"Yet he claimed to know you."

"So I am told."

"And you don't know *where* he may have seen you?"

"All I know, you have heard in the evidence given to-day."

"And—" hesitating slightly; "is there nothing in your past life that might weigh in your favour; nothing that will give the lie to these hints so industriously scattered by Burrill?"

"O'Meara, let us understand each other; your question means this: Do I intend, now that this crisis has come, to make public, for the benefit of W——, the facts concerning my life previous to my coming here as a resident? My answer must be this, and again I must give you reason to think me ungracious, ungrateful. There is nothing in my past that could help me in this present emergency; there is no one who could come forward to my assistance. I have not in all America one friend who is so well known to me, or who knows me as well, as Vandyck here, or yourself. I can not drag to light any of the events of my past life; on the contrary, I must redouble my efforts to keep that past a mystery."

Utter silence in the cell. The lawyer's pencil travels on—scratch, scratch, scratch. Ray sits moody and troubled of aspect. Doctor Heath looks with some curiosity upon the movements of the little lawyer, and inwardly wonders at his coolness. He has expected expostulation, indignation; has even fancied that his obstinate refusal to lend his friends any assistance may alienate them from his case, leaving him to face his fate alone. He sees how Vandyck is chafing, but he is puzzled by the little lawyer's phlegmatic acceptance of the situation.

Presently, the lawyer looks up, snaps his note book together with a quick movement, and then stows it away carefully in his breast pocket.

"Umph!" he begins, raising the five fingers of his right hand and checking off his items with the pencil which he has transferred to the left. "Umph! Then your case stand like this, my friend: A man is found dead near your premises; a handkerchief bearing your name covers his face; a knife supposed to belong to you is with the body. You are known to have differed with this man; you have knocked him down; you have threatened him in the public streets. You are a stranger to W——. This murdered man claimed to know something to your disadvantage. He is known to have set out for your house; he is found soon after, as I have said, dead. You acknowledge the knife and handkerchief to be

yours; you can offer no *alibi*, you can rebut none of the testimony. You refuse to tell aught concerning your past life. That's a fine case, now; don't you think so?"

"It's a worthless case for you, O'Meara. You had better leave me to fight my own battles."

"Umph! I'm going to leave you for the present; but this battle may turn out to be not entirely your property, my friend. Since you won't help me, I won't disturb you further. Come along, Vandyck."

Young Vandyck began at once to expostulate, to entreat, to argue; but the little lawyer cut short the tide of his eloquence.

"Vandyck, be quiet! Can't you let a gentleman hang himself, if he sees fit? No, I see you can't; it's against your nature. Well, come along; we will see if we can't outwit this would-be suicide, and the hangman, too." And he fairly forces poor, bewildered Ray from the room. Then, turning again toward his uncommunicative client, he says:

"Oh, I'll attend to that knife business at once, Heath, and let you hear the result."

"Stop a moment, O'Meara. There is one thing I can say, and that is,—have the wounds in that body examined at once. As nearly as I could observe, without a closer scrutiny, the knife that killed was not the knife found with the body. It was a smaller, narrower-bladed knife; and, if an expert examines that knife, the one found, he will be satisfied that it has never entered any body, animal or human. The *point* has never been dipped in blood."

"Oh! oh!" cries O'Meara, rubbing his hands together briskly. "So! we are waking up! Why didn't you mention all this before? But there's time enough! time enough yet. I'll have the body examined; and by the best surgeons, sir; and I'll see you to-morrow, *early;* good evening, Heath."

"I'm blessed if I understand all this," burst out Ray Vandyck, when they had gained the street. "Here you have kept me with my mouth stopped all through this queer confab. I want a little light on this subject. What the deuce ails Heath, that he won't lift his voice to defend himself? And what the mischief did you let him throw away his best chances for? I never heard of such foolhardiness."

"Young man," retorts the little lawyer, with a queer smile upon his face," "just at present I have got no use for that tongue of yours. You may be all eyes and ears, the more the better; but, I'm going to include you in a very important private consultation; and, *don't you open your mouth* until somebody asks you to; and then mind you get it open quick enough and wide enough."

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEGINNING THE INVESTIGATION.

"WELL!"

It is Mr. Wedron, of the New York Bar, who utters this monosyllable. He sits at the library table in the little lawyer's sanctum; opposite him is his host, and a little farther away stands Ray Vandyck; a living, breathing, gloomy-faced but mute interrogation point. He has just been introduced to Mr. Wedron, and he is anxiously waiting to hear how these two men porpose to save from the gallows a man who will make no effort to save himself.

"Well;" repeats Mr. Wedron, "you have seen the prisoner?"

"We have seen him."

"And the result?"

"Was what you predicted. See, here in my note book, I have his very words; you can judge for yourself"

O'Meara passes his note book across to his questioner, and the latter reads rapidly the short sentences scrawled by his host.

"So," he says, lifting his eyes from the note book. "Doctor Heath refuses to defend himself. Mr. Vandyck," turning suddenly upon Ray, "sit down, sir; draw your chair up here; I wish to look at you, sir."

Not a little astonished, but obeying orders like a veteran, Ray complies mutely.

"Now then," said Mr. Wedron, with brisk good nature, "let's get down to business. Mr. Vandyck, I am here to save Clifford Heath; I was at the inquest; I have had long experience in this sort of business, and I arrive at my conclusions rapidly, after a way of my own. O'Meara prepare to write a synopsis of our reasonings."

"Of *your* reasonings," corrects the lawyer, drawing pen and paper toward himself.

"Of my reasonings then. First; are you ready, O'Meara?"

"All ready."

"Well, then; and don't stop to be astonished at anything I may say. First,

Clifford Heath knows who stole his handkerchief, and who stole his knife."

A grunt of approbation from O'Meara; a stare of astonishment from Ray.

"For some reason, Heath has resolved to screen the thief." Scratch, scratch. "But he does not feel at all sure that the one who stole his belongings is the one who struck the blow."

Ray stares in astonishment.

"Now then, there has been a plot on foot against Heath, and I believe him to have been aware of it." He is looking at Ray, and that young man starts guiltily.

"Put down this, O'Meara," said Mr. Wedron, suddenly withdrawing his gaze. "Doctor Heath has nothing to blush for in his past. He withholds his story through pride, not through fear; but it may be necessary to tell it in court, in order to prove that he *did not* know John Burrill previous to the meeting in Nance Burrill's cottage; and if he refuses to tell his story, *I* must tell it for him."

It is O'Meara's turn to be surprised, and he writes on with eager eyes and bated breath.

"And now, O'Meara," concludes Mr. Wedron, "there were two parties sworn today, who did not tell all they knew concerning this affair. One was—Mr. Francis Lamotte."

Ray breathes again.

"The other was—Mr. Raymond Vandyck."

Ray colours hotly, and half starts up from his seat. O'Meara lays down his pen, and stares across at his contemporary, but that individual proceeds with unruffled serenity.

"Mr. Vandyck did not tell all that he knows, because he feared that in some way his testimony might be turned against Clifford Heath. Here he can have no such scruples. Our first step in this case, must be to find out *who* Clifford Heath suspects, and why he will not denounce him."

"And that bids fair to be a tough undertaking," says O'Meara.

"Not at all, Mr. O'Meara. I expect that this young man can give us all the help we need."

"I!" burst out Ray. "You mistake, sir; I cannot help you."

"Softly, sir; softly; reflect a little, this is no time for over-nice scruples; besides, I know too much already. We three are here to help Clifford Heath. Mr. Vandyck, can you not trust to our discretion? You may be able, unknown to yourself, to speak the word that will free you friend from the foulest charge that was ever preferred against a man. Will you answer my questions frankly, or—must we set detectives to hunt for the information you could so easily give?"

The calm, resolute tones of the stranger have their weight with the mystified Ray. Instinctively he feels the power of the man, and the weight of the argument.

"What do you wish to know, sir?" he says, quietly. "I am ready to serve Clifford Heath."

"Ah, very good;" signing to O'Meara. "First, sir, as a friend of Doctor Heath, do you know if he has recently had any trouble, any disappointment? He is a young man. Has he been jilted, or—"

"Ah-h-h!" breaks in O'Meara; "why didn't you ask *me* that, Wedron? Upon my soul, I have heard plenty about this same business."

"Then take the witness-stand, sir. What do you know? *You* won't be over delicate in bringing facts to the surface."

"Why," rubbing his hands serenely, "I can't see your drift, Wedron, any more than can Vandyck here; but I have heard Mrs. O'Meara discuss the probable future of Clifford Heath, until I have it by heart. Not long ago she was sure he, Heath, was in love with Miss Wardour, and we all thought she rather favoured him, although it's hard to guess at a woman's real feelings. Later, quite lately, in fact, the thing seemed to be all off, and my wife has commented on it not a little."

"Oh!" ejaculates Mr. Wedron. "And—had Dr. Heath any rivals?"

"Miss Wardour has always plenty of lovers; but I believe that Mr. Frank Lamotte was the only rival he ever had any reason to fear."

"Ah! so Mr. Frank Lamotte has been Heath's rival? Handsome fellow, that Lamotte! Mr. Vandyck," turning suddenly upon Ray, "the ice is now broken. What do you know, or think, or believe, about this attachment to Miss Wardour?"

"I think that Heath really hoped to win her at one time, and I believed his chances were good. Something, I don't know what, has come between them."

"Do you think she has refused him?"

"Honestly, I don't, sir. I think there is a misunderstanding."

"And young Lamotte, what of him?"

"I suppose he has come in ahead; in fact, have very good cause for thinking him engaged to Miss Wardour."

"Bah!" cries O'Meara, contemptuously, "I don't believe it. There's nothing sly about Constance. She would have told me or my wife."

"I'll tell you my reasons for saying this, gentlemen," says Ray, after a moment's hesitation. "I'll tell you all I can about the business. Some time ago, shortly after Heath's last encounter with Burrill, I came into town one day to keep an appointment with him."

"Stay! Can you recall the date?"

"It was on Monday, I believe, and early in the month."

"Go on."

"I met one of the Wardour servants, who gave me a note. It was a request that I wait upon Miss Wardour at once; she wished to consult me on some private matters. Miss Wardour and I, you must understand, are very old friends."

"Yes, yes; go on."

"I excused myself to Heath, and, just as I was leaving the office, Lamotte came in. He challenged me in badinage, as though he had a right to say who should visit Wardour. He overheard me tell Heath where I was going."

"Yes."

"During my call, I made some allusion to Lamotte, speaking of him as her accepted lover. She did not deny the charge my language implied, and I came away believing her engaged to Lamotte. When I returned to Heath's office, Lamotte had gone, and Heath asked me, rather abruptly, if I believed Miss Wardour would marry Lamotte. I replied that I did believe it then, for the first time."

"Ah, yes! Mr. Vandyck, are you aware that on this same day, this Monday, of which you speak, Clifford Heath received an anonymous note, in a feminine hand, warning him against danger, and begging him to leave town?"

"What, sir?" starting and colouring, hotly.

"Ah, you are aware of that fact. Did you see that note, Mr. Vandyck?"

"I did," uneasily.

"How did Heath treat it?"

"With utter indifference."

"So! And did he, to your knowledge, receive other warnings?"

"I am quite sure he did not."

"During your call at Wardour Place, did Miss Wardour mention Doctor Heath?"

"She—did," reluctantly.

"She *did*. Can you recall what was said."

"It was soon after the street encounter with Burrill. I related the circumstance; she had not heard of it."

"And did she seem unfriendly toward Heath?"

"On the contrary, I think she was, and is, his friend."

"You met Lamotte in Heath's office. Does Lamotte go there often?"

"Why, he made a pretence of studying with Heath, but he never stuck very close to anything; he had read a little in the city, I believe."

"Then he is quite at home in Heath's office?"

"Quite at home."

"Thank you, Mr. Vandyck." Mr. Wedron draws back from the table and smiles blandly upon poor Ray. "Thank you, sir. You are an admirable witness; for the second time today you have evaded leading questions, and withheld more than you have told. But I won't bear malice. I see that you are resolved not to tell why Miss Wardour summoned you to her presence on that particular day; so I won't insist upon it—I will find out in some other way."

"Thank you," retorts Ray rather stiffly. "It will be a relief to me, if you can do so. Can I answer any more questions, sir?"

"Not to-night. And, Mr. Vandyck, as a friend of Clifford Heath's, we ask you to help us, and to share our confidence. Now, we must find out first, if Constance Wardour *is* engaged to Lamotte; and second the cause of the estrangement between herself and Doctor Heath. Can you suggest a plan?"

"Yes," replies Ray, a smile breaking over his face. "Send for Mrs. Aliston, and question her as you have me."

"Good!" cries Mr. Wedron. "*Excellent!*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN APPEAL TO THE WARDOUR HONOUR.

DURING the night that saw Sybil Burrill's reason give way under that long, horrible strain, that had borne upon it; the night that witnessed the downfall of Frank Lamotte's cherished hopes, and closed the earthly career of John Burrill; Mrs. Lamotte and Mrs. Aliston hovered over the bed where lay Sybil, now tossing in delirium, now sinking into insensibility. Early in the evening Dr. Heath

had been summoned, and he had responded promptly to Mrs. Lamotte's eager call.

They could do little, just then, save to administer opiates; he told them there was every symptom of brain fever; by to-morrow he would know what course of treatment to pursue; until then, keep the patient quiet, humour all her whims, so far as was possible; give her no stimulants, and, if there was any marked change send for him at once.

The two anxious women hung upon his words; afterward, they remembered how cheerful, how brave and strong he had seemed that night; how gentle his voice was; how kindly his glance; how soothing and reassuring his manner.

In the gray of the morning, Sybil dropped into one of her lethargies after hours of uneasy mutterings, that would have been mad ravings, but for the doctor's powerful opiate; and then, after a word combat with Mrs. Lamotte, just such an argument as has occurred by hundreds of sick beds, where two weary anxious watchers vie with each other for the place beside the bed, and the right to watch in weariness while the other rests; after such an argument, Mrs. Aliston yielded to the solicitations of her hostess, and withdrew, to refresh herself with a little sleep.

The vigil had been an unusual one, and Mrs. Aliston was very weary. No sound disturbed the quiet of the elegant guest-chamber where she lay; and so it happened that a brisk rapping at her door, at ten o'clock in the morning, awoke her from a heavy, dreamless slumber, and set her wandering wits to wondering vaguely what all this strangeness meant. Then suddenly recalling the events of the previous night, she sat up in bed and called out:

"Who is there?"

"It's ten o'clock, madam," replied the voice of Mrs. Lamotte's maid; "and will you have breakfast in your room, or in the dining-room?"

Slipping slowly out from the downy bed, Mrs. Aliston crossed to the door, and peering out at the servant, said:

"I will breakfast here, Ellen. How is Sybil?"

"She is worse I think, madam, and Mrs. Lamotte is very uneasy; I think she wishes to speak with you, or she would not have had you awakened."

"Tell her I will come to her at once;" and Mrs. Aliston closed the door and began a hurried toilet; before it was completed, Mrs. Lamotte herself appeared; she was pale and heavy-eyed, and seemed much agitated.

"Pardon my intrusion," she began, hurriedly; "I am uneasy about Sybil; she is growing very restless, and for more than an hour has called unceasingly for Constance. Do you think your niece would come to us this morning? Her strong, cool nerves might have some influence upon poor Sybil."

"I am sure she will come," replied Mrs. Aliston, warmly, "and without a moment's delay. I will drive home at once, Mrs. Lamotte, and send Constance back."

"Not until you have had breakfast, Mrs. Aliston. And how can I thank you for your goodness, and your help, during the past horrible night?"

"By saying nothing at all about it, my dear, and by ordering the carriage the moment I have swallowed a cup of coffee," replied the good-hearted soul, cheerily. "I hope and trust that Sybil will recover very soon; but if she grows worse, you must let me help you all I can."

Half an hour later the Lamotte carriage rolled swiftly across the bridge and towards Wardour; and so Mrs. Aliston, for the time at least, was spared the shock that fell upon the house of Mapleton, scarce fifteen minutes later—the news of John Burrill's murder, and the finding of the body.

Little more than an hour later, Constance Wardour sprang from the carriage at the door of Mapleton, and ran hurriedly up the broad steps. The outer door stood wide open, and a group of servants were huddled about the door of the drawing-room, with pale, affrighted faces, and panic-stricken manner.

Seeing them, Constance at once takes the alarm. Sybil must be worse; must be very ill indeed. Instantly the question rises to her lips;

"Is Sybil—is Mrs. Burrill worse?" and then she hears the startling truth.

"John Burrill is dead. John Burrill has been murdered." In bewilderment, in amazement, she hears all there is to tell, all that the servants know. A messenger came, telling only the bare facts. John Burrill's body has been found in an old cellar; Frank has just gone, riding like a madman, to see that the body is cared for, and to bring it home. Mrs. Lamotte has been told the horrible news; has received it like an icicle; has ordered them to prepare the drawing-room for the reception of the body, and has gone back to her daughter.

All this Constance hears, and then, strangely startled, and vaguely thankful that Frank is not in the house, she goes up to the sick room. Mrs. Lamotte rises to greet her, with a look upon her face that startles Constance, even more than did the news she has just heard below stairs.

Intense feeling has been for so long frozen out of that high-bred, haughty face, that the look of the eyes, the compression of the lips, the fear and horror of the entire countenance, amount almost to a transfiguration.

She draws Constance away from the bed, and into the dressing-room beyond. Then, in a voice husky with suppressed emotion, she addresses her as follows:

"Constance Wardour, I am about to place my honour, my daughter's life, the honour of all my family, in your hands. There is not another living being in whom to trust, and I must trust some one. I must, for my child's sake, have relief, or *my* reason, too, will desert me. Constance, that sick room holds a terrible secret—Sybil's secret. If you can share it with me, for Sybil's sake, I will try to brave this tempest, as I have braved others; if you refuse"—she paused a moment, and then whispered fiercely:

"If you refuse, I will lock that chamber door, and Sybil Lamotte shall die in her delirium before I will allow an ear that I cannot trust within those walls, or the hand of a possible enemy to administer one life-saving draught."

Over the face of Constance Wardour crept a look of horror indescribable. In an instant her mind is illuminated, and all the fearful meaning of Mrs. Lamotte's strange words, is grasped and mastered. She reels as if struck by a heavy hand, and a low moan breaks from her lips. So long she stands thus, mute and awe-stricken, that Mrs. Lamotte can bear the strain of suspense no longer.

"For God's sake, speak," she gasps; "there have been those of your race who could not abandon a fallen friend."

Over the cheek, and neck, and brow, the hot, proud, loyal Wardour blood comes surging. The gray eyes lift themselves with a proud flash; low and firm comes the answer:

"The Wardours were never summer friends. Sybil has been as a sister in prosperity; I shall be no less than a sister now. You may trust me as you would yourself; and—I am very glad you sent for me, and trusted no other."

"God bless you, Constance! No one else *can* be trusted. With your help I must do this work alone."

Then comes a cry from the sick room; they go back, and Constance enters at once upon her new, strange task. Her heart heavy; her hand firm; her ears smitten by the babbling recitation of that awful secret; and her lips sealed with the seal of the Wardour honour.

All that day she is at her post. Mrs. Lamotte, who is resolved to retain her strength for Sybil's sake, lies down in the dressing-room and sleeps from sheer exhaustion.

As the day wears on there is movement and bustle down stairs, they are bringing in the body of the murdered man. The undertaker goes about his work with pompous air, and solemn visage; and when darkness falls, John Burrill's lifeless form lies in state in the drawing-room of Mapleton, that room over the splendours of which his plebeian soul has gloated, his covetous eyes feasted, and his ambitious bosom swelled with a sense of proprietorship. He is clothed in finest broadcloth, surrounded with costly trappings; but not one tear falls over him; not one heart grieves for him; not one tongue utters a word of sorrow or regret; he has schemed and sinned to become a member of the aristocracy, to ally himself to the proud Lamottes; and to-night, one and all of the Lamottes breathe the freer because his breathing has for ever ceased. Even Constance Wardour has no pitying thought for the dead man; she keeps aloof from the drawing-room, shuddering when compelled to pass its closed doors; living, John Burrill was odious to her; dead, he is loathsome.

The day passes, and Dr. Heath does not visit his patient. At intervals during the long afternoon, they have discussed the question, "What shall we do to keep the patient quiet when the doctor comes?"

It is Constance who solves the problem.

"We must send for Doctor Benoit, Mrs. Lamotte; Dr. Heath's tardiness will furnish sufficient excuse, and Dr. Benoit's partial deafness will render him our safest physician."

It is a happy thought; Doctor Benoit is old, and partially deaf, but he is a thoroughly good and reliable physician.

Late that night, Jasper Lamotte applies for admittance at the door of his daughter's sick room. Constance opens the door softly, and as the eyes fall upon her, she fancies that a look of fierce hatred gleams at her for a

moment from those sunken orbs and darkens his haggard countenance. Of course it is only a fancy. In another moment he is asking after his daughter, with grave solicitude.

"She is quiet; she must not be disturbed;" so Constance tells him. And he glides away softly, murmuring his gratitude to his daughter's friend, as he goes.

It is midnight at Mapleton; in Sybil Lamotte's room the lights burn dimly, and Mrs. Lamotte and Constance sit near the bed, listening, with sad, set faces, to the ravings of the delirious girl.

"Ha! ha!" she cries, tossing her bare arms aloft. "How well you planned that, Constance! the Wardour diamonds; ah, they are worth keeping, they are worth plotting to keep—and it's often done—it's easy to do. Hush! Mr. Belknap, I need your help—meet me, meet me to-night, at the boat-house. If a man were to disappear, never to come back, mind—what would I give? One thousand dollars! two! three! It shall be done! I shall be free! free! *free!* Ha! ha! Constance, your diamonds are safer than mine—but what are diamonds—I shall live a lie—let me adorn myself with lies. Why not? Why care? I will be free. You have been the tool of others, Mr. Belknap, why hesitate to serve me—you want money—here it is, half of it. When it is done, when I *know* it is done, I will come here again—at night—and the rest is yours."

With a stifled moan, Mrs. Lamotte leans forward, and lays a hand upon her companion's arm.

"Constance—do you know what she means?"

Slowly and shudderingly, the girl answers:

"I fear—that I know too well."

"And—that boat-house appointment?"

"Must be kept, Mrs. Lamotte; for Sybil's sake, it must be kept, *by you or me.*"

It is midnight. In Evan Lamotte's room lamps are burning brightly, and the fumes of strong liquor fill the air. On the bed lies Evan, with flushed face, and mud bespattered clothing; he is in a sleep that is broken and feverish, that borders in fact upon delirium; beside him, pale as a corpse, with nerves unstrung, and trembling, sits Frank Lamotte, fearing to leave him, and loath to stay. At intervals, the sleeper grows more restless, and then starts up with wild ejaculations, or bursts of demoniac laughter. At such times, Frank Lamotte pours, from a bottle at his side, a powerful draught of burning brandy, and holds it to the frenzied lips. They drain off the liquor, and presently relapse into quiet.

It is midnight. In the library of Mapleton, Jasper Lamotte sits at his desk, poring over a pile of papers. The curtains are closely drawn, the door securely locked. Now and then he rises, and paces nervously up and down the room, gesticulating fiercely, and wearing such a look as has never been seen upon the countenance of the Jasper Lamotte of society.

It is midnight. In the Mapleton drawing-room, all that remains of John Burrill lies in solemn solitary state; and, down in his cell, face downward upon his pallet, lies Clifford Heath, broad awake, and bitterly reviewing the wrongs heaped upon him by fate; realizing to the full his own helplessness and the peril before him, and doggedly resolving to die, and make no sign.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I CAN SAVE HIM IF I WILL."

DOCTOR BENOIT was old and deaf; he was also very talkative. One of those physicians who invariably leave a titbit of news alongside of their powders and pellets. A constant talker is apt to be an indiscreet talker, and, very often, wanting in tact. Doctor Benoit was not so much deficient in tact, as in memory. In growing old, he had grown forgetful, and not being a society man, society gossip was less dear to his heart than the news of political outbreaks, business strivings, and about-town sensations. Doubtless he had heard, like all the world of W——, that Doctor Clifford Heath had, at one time, been an aspirant for the favour of the proud heiress of Wardour, and that suddenly he had fallen from grace, and was no more seen within the walls of Wordour, or at the side of its mistress on social occasions. If so, he had entirely forgotten these facts. Accordingly, during his second call, made on the morning after the inquest, he began to drop soft remarks concerning the recent horror.

Mrs. Lamotte was lying down, and Constance had decided not to arose her when the doctor arrived, inasmuch as the patient was in one of her stupors, and not likely to rouse from it.

The arrest of a brother practitioner on such a charge as was preferred against Clifford Heath, had created no little commotion in the

mind of Dr. Benoit, and he found it difficult to keep the subject off his tongue, so, after he had given Constance full instructions concerning the patient, he said, standing hat in hand near the dressing-room door:

"This is a terrible state of affairs for W——, Miss Wardour. Do you know," drawing a step nearer, and lowering his voice, "Do you know if Mr. Lamotte has been informed that O'Meara, as Heath's lawyer, demands a surgical examination?"

"As Heath's lawyer!" The room seemed to swim about her. She turned instinctively toward the door of the chamber, closed it softly, and came very close to the old doctor, lifting her pale lips to his ear.

"I don't understand you, doctor. What has Mr. O'Meara to do with the murder?"

"Hey? What's that? What is Mr. O'Meara going to do? He's going to defend young Heath." Then, seeing the startled, perplexed look upon her face, "Is it possible you have not heard about Heath's arrest?"

She shook her head, and again lifted her lips to his ear.

"I have heard nothing; tell me all."

"It seems there was an old feud between Heath and Burrill," began the doctor, beginning to feel that somehow he had made a blunder. "They have hunted up some pretty strong evidence against Heath, and the coroner's jury brought in a verdict against him. You know the body was found in an old cellar, close by Heath's cottage."

At this moment there came a soft tap on the outer door, which Constance at once recognised. Mechanically she moved forward and opened the door. Mrs. Lamotte stood on the threshold.

Seeing the doctor and Constance, she at once inferred that Sybil was the subject under discussion, and to insure the patient against being disturbed, beckoned the doctor to come outside.

As he stepped out into the hall, Constance, hoping to get a little information from him, came forward, and standing in the doorway, partially closed the door behind her.

"Doctor," said Mrs. Lamotte, anxiously, "do you see any change in Sybil?"

"There is no marked change, madam; but I see a possibility that she may return to consciousness within the next forty-eight hours, in which case I must warn you against letting her know or guess at the calamity that has befallen her."

The two women exchanged glances of relief.

"If she receives no shock until her mental balance is fully restored, her recovery may be hoped for; otherwise—"

"Otherwise, doctor?"

"Otherwise, if she retains her life, it will be at the cost of her reason."

"Oh!" moaned the mother, "death would be better than that."

There was the sound of a door opening softly down the hall. They all turned their eyes that way to see Frank Lamotte emerging from Evan's room. He came hurriedly toward them, and Constance noticed the nervous unsteadiness of his gait, the pinched and pallid look of his face, the feverish fire of his sunken eyes.

"Mother," he said, in a constrained voice, and without once glancing toward Constance. "I think you had better have Doctor Benoit see Evan. I have been with him all night, and am thoroughly worn out."

"What ails Evan, Frank?"

"Too much liquor," with a shrug of the shoulders. "He is on the verge of the 'brandy madness,' he sometimes sings of. He must have powerful narcotics, and no cessation of his stimulants, or we will have him raving about the house like a veritable madman; and—I have not told him about Burrill."

A look of contrition came into the mother's face. Evan had kept his room for days, but, in her anxiety for her dearest child, she had quite forgotten him.

"Come, doctor," she said quickly; "let us go to Evan at once."

They passed on to the lower room, leaving Constance and Frank face to face.

Constance moved back a pace as if to reenter the dressing-room; burning with anxiety as she was, to hear more concerning Clifford Heath her womanly instincts were too true to permit her to ask information of her discarded suitor. But Frank's voice stayed her movements.

"Constance, only one moment," he said, appealingly. "Have a little patience with me *now*. Have a little pity for my misery."

His misery! The words sounded hypocritical; he had never loved John Burrill over much, she knew.

"I bestow my pity whenever it is truly needed, Frank," she said, coldly, her face whitening with the anguish of her inward

thought. "Do you think *you* are the only sufferer in this miserable affair?"

"I am the only one who cannot enlist your sympathies. I must live without your love; I must bear a name disgraced, yet those who brought about this family disgrace, even Clifford Heath, in a felon's cell, no doubt you will aid and pity; *he* is a martyr perhaps, while I—"

"While you—go on, sir;" fierce scorn shining from her grey eyes; bitter sarcasm in the voice.

"While I," coming closer and fairly hissing the words, "am set aside for him, a felon. Oh! you are a proud woman, and you keep your secrets well, but you cannot hide from me the fact that ever since the accursed day that brought you and Clifford Heath together, *he* has been the man preferred by you. If I have lost you, you have none the less lost him; listen."

Before she is aware of his purpose, he has her two wrists in a vice-like grip; and bending down, until his lips almost touch the glossy locks on her averted head, he is pouring out, in swift cutting sentences, the story of the inquest; all the damning evidence is swiftly rehearsed; nothing that can weigh against his rival, is omitted.

Feeling instinctively that he utters the truth, paralysed by the weight of his words; she stands with head drooping more and more, with cheeks growing paler, with hands that tremble and grow cold in his clasp.

He sees her terror, a sudden thought possesses his brain; grasping her hands still tighter, he goes madly on:

"Constance Wardour, in spite of the coldness between you, you love Clifford Heath. *What will you do to save him?*"

"This is too much! This is horrible!" She makes a mad effort to free herself from his grasp.

The question comes like a taunt, a declaration of her helplessness. Coming from him, it is maddening. It restores her courage; it makes her mistress of herself once more.

"Don't repeat that question," she says, flashing upon him a look of defiance.

"I *do* repeat it!" he goes on wildly. "Go to O'Meara; to whom you please; satisfy yourself that Clifford Heath has a halter about his neck; then come to me, and tell me if you will give yourself as his ransom. *I can save him if I will.* I *will* save him, only on one condition. You know what that is."

With a sudden fierce effort she frees herself from his clasp, and stands erect before him, fairly panting with the fierceness of her anger.

"Traitor! *monster!* Cain! Not to save all the lives of my friends; not to save the world from perdition, would I be your wife! *You* would denounce the destroyer of that worthless clay below us. *You!* Before that should happen, to save the world the knowledge that such a monster exists, *I* will tell the the world where the guilt lies, *for I know.*"

Before he could realise the full meaning of her words, the dressing-room door is closed between them, and Frank Lamotte stands gnashing his teeth, beating the air with his hands in a frenzy of rage and despair.

While he stands thus, a step comes slowly up the stairs: he turns to meet the gaze of his father.

"Frank," says Jasper Lamotte, in low, guarded accents, "Come down to the library at once. It is time you knew the truth."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LAST RESORT.

LIKE a man in a dream, Frank Lamotte obeys his father's call, never once thinking that the summons is strangely worded. Over and over in his mind the question is repeating itself—What did she mean? Was he going mad? Was he dreaming? Had Constance Wardour really said a word that rendered himself and all that household unsafe? If she knew who should stand in Clifford Heath's stead, would she really spare the culprit? No; it was impossible. Was her talk bravado? Was she seeking to deceive him?

"Impossible," he reasons. "If she knew who struck that blow, then I am ruined utterly. But she does not know—she can not."

Jasper Lamotte leads the way to the library. It seems natural that he should move softly, cautiously. A supernatural stillness pervades the lower floor. Frank Lamotte shudders and keeps his eyes turned away from the closed-up drawing-room with its silent tenant.

When they are seated face to face, with locked door and closely drawn curtains, Frank looks across at his father, and notes for the first time that day the lines of care settling about the sallow mouth, and underneath the dark, brooding eyes. A moment of silence rests between them, while each reads the signs of

disaster in the face of the other. Finally the elder says, with something very like a sneer in his voice:

"One would think you a model mourner, your visage is sufficiently woful." Then leaning across the table, and elevating one long forefinger: "Something more than the simple fact of Burrill's death has shaken you, Frank. *What is it?*"

Frank Lamotte utters a low mirthless laugh.

"I might say the same of you, sir; your present pallor can scarcely be attributed to grief."

"True;" a darker shadow falling across his countenance. "Nor is it grief. It is bitter disappointment. Have you seen Miss Wardour?"

"Yes;" averting his head.

"And your case in that quarter?"

"Hopeless."

"What!" sharply.

"Hopeless, I tell you, sir; do I look like a prosperous wooer? She will not look at me. She will not touch me. She will not have me at any price."

Jasper Lamotte mutters a curse. "Then you have been playing the poltroon," he says savagely.

The countenance of the younger man grows livid. He starts up from his chair, then sinks weakly back again.

"Drop the subject," he says hoarsely. "That card is played, and lost. Is this all you have to say?"

"All! I wish it were. What took me to the city?"

"What took you, true enough. The need of a few thousands, ready cash."

"Yes. Well! I have not got the cash."

"But—good heavens! you had ample—securities."

"Ample securities, yes," with a low grating laugh. "Look, I don't know who has interposed thus in our favour, but—if John Burrill were alive to-night you and I would be—beggars."

"Impossible, while you hold the valuable—"

"Bah! valuable indeed! You and I have been fooled, duped, deluded. Our treasured securities are—"

"Well, are what?"

"Shams."

"Shams!" incredulously. "But that is impossible."

"Is it?" cynically. "Then the impossible has come to pass. There's nothing genuine in the whole lot."

A long silence falls between them. Frank Lamotte sits staring straight before him; sudden conviction seems to have overtaken his panic-stricken senses. Jasper Lamotte drums upon the table impatiently, looking moody and despondent.

"A variety of queer things may seem plain to you now," he says, finally. Perhaps you realise the necessity for instant action of some sort."

Frank stirs restlessly, and passes his hand across his brows.

"I can't realise anything fully," he says, slowly. "It's as well that Burrill did not live to know this."

"Well! It's providential! We should not have a chance; as it is we have one. Do you know where Burrill kept his papers?"

"No."

"Who removed his personal effects? Were you present?"

"Assuredly. There were no papers of value to us upon the body."

"Well those papers must be found. Once in our hands, we are safe enough for the present; but until we find them, we are not so secure. However, I have no doubt but that they are secreted somewhere about his room. Have you seen Belknap to-day?"

"Only at the inquest. Curse that fellow; I wish we were rid of him entirely."

"I wish we were rid of his claim; but it must be paid somehow."

"Somehow!" echoing the word, mockingly.

"That is the word I used. I must borrow the money."

"Indeed! Of whom?"

"Of Constance Wardour."

"What!"

"Why not, pray? Am I to withdraw because you have been discarded? Why should I not borrow from this tricky young lady? Curse her!"

"Well!" rising slowly, "she is under your roof at this moment. Strike while the iron is hot. Have you anything more to say to-night?"

"No. You are too idiotic. Get some of the cobwebs out of your brain, and that scared look out of your face. One would think that *you*, and not Heath, were the murderer of Burrill."

A strange look darts from the eyes of Frank Lamotte.

"It won't be so decided by a jury," he says,

between his shut teeth. "Curse Heath, he is the man who, all along, has stood in my way."

"Well, there's a strong likelihood that he will be removed from your path. There, go, and don't look so abjectly hopeless. We have nothing to do at present, but to quiet Belknap. Good night."

With lagging steps, Frank Lamotte ascends the stairs, and enters his own room. He locks the door with a nervous hand, and then hurriedly lowers the curtains. He goes to the mirror, and gazes at his reflected self,—hollow, burning eyes, haggard cheeks, blanched lips that twitch convulsively, a mingled expression of desperation, horror, and despair,—that is what he sees, and the sight does not serve to steady his nerves. He turns away, with a curse upon the white lips.

He flings himself down in a huge easy chair, and dropping his chin upon his breast, tries to think; but thought only deepens the despairing horror and fear upon his countenance. Where his father sees one foe, Francis Lamotte sees ten.

He sees before him Jerry Belknap, private detective, angry, implacable, menacing, not to be quieted. He sees Clifford Heath, pale, stern, accusing. Constance Wardour, scornful, menacing, condemning and consigning him to dreadful punishment. The dead face of John Burrill rises before him, jeering, jibing, odious, seeming to share with him some ugly secret. He passes his hand across his brow, and starts up suddenly.

"Bah!" he mutters, "this is no time to dally; on every side I see a pitfall. Let every man look to himself. If I must play in my last trump, let me be prepared."

He takes from his pocket a bunch of keys, and, selecting one of the smallest, unlocks a drawer of his dressing-case. He draws forth a pair of pistols and examines them carefully. Then he withdraws the charges from both weapons, and loads one anew. The latter he conceals about his person, and then takes up the other. He hesitates a moment, and then loads that also, replaces it in its hiding-place, closes and locks the drawer. Then he breathes a long sigh of relief.

"It's a deadly anchor to windward," he mutters, turning away. "It's a last resort. Now I have only to wait."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

WHILE Frank Lamotte, in his own chamber, is preparing himself for emergencies, Constance Wardour stands by the bedside of her unconscious friend, struggling for self-control; shutting her lips firmly together, clenching her teeth; mastering her outward self, by the force of her strong will; and striving to bring the chaos of her mind into like subjection. Three facts stare her in the face; three ideas dance through her bain and mingle themselves in a confused mass. Clifford Heath is in peril. She can save him by betraying a friend and a trust. She loves him.

Yes, stronger than all, greater than all, this fact stands out; in this hour of peril the truth will not be frowned down. She loves this man who stands accused of murder; she loves him, and, great heavens! he is innocent, and yet must suffer for the guilty.

What can she do? What must she do? She cannot go to him; she, by her own act, has cut off all friendly intercourse between them. But something must be done, shall be done.

Suddenly, she bends down, and looks long and earnestly into the face of the sleeper. The dark lashes rest upon cheeks that are pale as ivory; the face looks torture-stricken; the beautiful lips quiver with the pain of some dismal dream.

Involuntarily, this cry escapes the lips of the watcher:

"My God! To think that two noble lives must be blasted, because of that pitiful, worthless thing that lies below."

The moments drag on heavily, her thoughts gradually shaping themselves into a resolve, while she watches by the bedside and waits the return of Mrs. Lamotte. At last, she comes, and there is an added shade of sorrow in her dark eyes; Evan is very ill, she fears for his reason, too.

"What has come upon my children, Constance?" she asks, brokenly; "even Frank has changed for the worse."

"Poor Evan!" sighs Constance, thinking of his loyal love for Sybil; and thus with her new resolve strong in mind, she says, briefly:

"I must go to town at once, Mrs. Lamotte, and will return as soon as possible. Can you spare me without too much weight upon yourself?"

Without a question, Mrs. Lamotte bids her go; and very soon she is driving swiftly toward W——, behind the splendid Lamotte horses.

Straight to Lawyer O'Meara she is whirled, and by the time she reaches the gate, she is as calm as an iceberg.

Coming down the steps is a familiar form, that of her aunt, Mrs. Aliston. Each lady seems a trifle disconcerted by this unexpected meeting; neither is inclined to explain her presence there.

Mrs. Aliston appears the more disturbed and startled of the two; she starts and flushes guiltily, at sight of her niece.

But Constance is intent upon her errand; she pauses long enough to inquire after her aunt's health, to report that Sybil is much the same, and Evan ill, and then she says:

"Is Mr. O'Meara at home, Aunt Honor?"

"Yes. That is, I believe so," stammers Mrs. Aliston.

"Then I must not detain you, or delay myself; good morning, auntie;" and she enters the house, leaving Mrs. Aliston looking perplexed and troubled.

Ushered into the presence of Mr. O'Meara, Constance wastes no words.

"Mr. O'Meara," she begins, in her most straightforward manner, "I have just come from Mapleton, where I have been with Sybil since last night. This morning, Doctor Benoit horrified me by telling me that Doctor Heath has been arrested for the murder of John Burrill."

Just here the study door opens softly, and a portly, pleasant-faced gentleman enters. He bows with easy self-possession, and turns expectantly toward O'Meara. That gentleman performed the ceremony of introduction.

"Miss Wardour, permit me: Mr. a— Wedron, of the New York Bar. Mr. Wedron, my dear, is here in the interest of Doctor Heath."

A pair of searching grey eyes are turned full upon the stranger, who bears the scrutiny with infinite composure. She bows gravely, and then seats herself opposite the two gentlemen.

"Mr. O'Meara," she says, imperiously, "I want to hear the full particulars of this affair, from the very first, up to the present moment."

The two professional men exchange glances. Then Mr. Wedron interposes: "Miss Wardour," he says, slowly, "we are acting for Clifford Heath, in this matter; therefore, I must ask, do you come as a friend of the accused, or—to offer testimony?"

Again the grey eyes flash upon him. "I come as a friend of Doctor Heath," she says haughtily; "and I ask only what is known to all W——, I suppose."

Mr. Wedron conceals a smile of satisfaction behind a smooth white hand; then he draws a bundle of papers from his pocket.

"O'Meara," he says, passing them to his colleague; "here are the items of the case, as we summed them up last evening; please read them to Miss Wardour." And he favours the little lawyer with a swift but significant glance.

Drawing his chair a little nearer that of his visitor, O'Meara begins, while the portly gentleman sits in the background and notes, lynx-like, every expression that flits across the face of the listening girl.

O'Meara reads on and on. The summing-up is very comprehensive. From the first discovery of the body, to the last item of testimony before the coroner's jury; and after that, the strangeness, the apathy, the obstinacy of the accused, and his utter refusal to add his testimony, or to accuse any other. Utter silence falls upon them as the reading ceases.

Constance sits mute and pale as a statue; Mr. Wedron seems quite self-absorbed, and Mr. O'Meara glances around nervously, as if waiting for a cue.

Constance turns her head slowly, and looks from one to the other.

"Mr. O'Meara, Mr. Wedron, you are to defend Doctor Heath, you tell me?" They both nod assent.

"And—have you, as his counsel, gathered no palliating proof? Nothing to set against this mass of blighting circumstantial evidence?"

Mr. Wedron leans forward, fastens his eyes upon her face, and says gravely: "Miss Wardour, all that can be done for Clifford Heath will be done. But—the case as it stands is against him. For some reason he has lost courage. He seems to place small value upon his life. I believe that he knows who is the guilty one, and that he is sacrificing himself. Furthermore, I believe that there are those who can tell, if they will, far more than has been told concerning this case; those who may withhold just the evidence that in a lawyer's hands will clear Clifford Heath."

The pallid misery of her face is pitiful, but it does not move Mr. Wedron.

"Last night," he goes on mercilessly, "Mr. Raymond Vandyck sat where you sit now, and I said to him what I now say to you, Miss Wardour—Raymond Vandyck knows more than he has told." His keen eyes search her face, her own orbs fall before his gaze. Then she lifts them suddenly, and asks abruptly:

"Who are the other parties who are withholding their testimony?"

Again Mr. Wedron suppresses a smile. "Another who knows more than he chooses to tell is Mr. Frank Lamotte."

She starts perceptibly.

"And—are there others?"

"Another, Miss Wardour, is—yourself."

"Myself!"

She bows her face upon her hands, and convulsive shudders shake her form. She sits thus so long that O'Meara becomes restless, but Mr. Wedron sits calm, serene, expectant.

By and by she lifts her head, and her eyes shine with the glint of blue steel.

"You are right, sir," she says in a low, steady voice. "I *can* tell more than is known. It may not benefit Doctor Heath; I do not see how it can. Nevertheless, all that I can tell you shall hear, and I only ask that you will respect such portions of my story as are not needed in evidence. As for Mr. O'Meara, I know I can trust him. And I believe, sir, that I can rely upon you."

Mr. Wedron bows gravely.

"I will begin by saying that Mr. Vandyck, if he has withheld anything concerning Doctor Heath, has acted honourably in so doing. He was bound by a promise, from which I shall at once release him."

In obedience to a sign from Mr. Wedron, O'Meara prepares to write.

"You have said, sir," addressing Mr. Wedron, "that I may be able to say something which, if withheld, would complicate this case. What do you wish to hear?"

"Everything, Miss Wardour, everything. All that you can tell concerning your acquaintance with Clifford Heath—all that you have seen and know concerning John Burrill; all that you can recall of the sayings and doings of the Lamottes. And remember, the things that may seem unimportant or irrelevant to you, may be the very items that we lack to complete what may be a chain of strong evidence in favour of the accused. Allow me to question you from time to time, and, if I seem possessed of too much information concerning your private affairs, do not be too greatly astonished, but rest assured that all my researches have been made to serve another, not to gratify myself."

"Where shall I begin, sir?"

"Begin where the first shadow of complication fell; begin at the first word or deed of Doctor Heath's that struck you as being in any way strange or peculiar."

She flushes hotly and begins her story.

She describes her first impression of Doctor Heath, touching lightly upon their acquaintance previous to the time of the robbery at Wardour. Then she describes very minutely the first call made by Doctor Heath, after that affair.

"One moment, Miss Wardour. You told Doctor Heath all that you knew concerning the robbery?"

"I did, sir," colouring rosily.

"And you exhibited to him the vial of chloroform and the piece of cambric?"

"I did."

"At this point you were interrupted by callers, and Doctor Heath left rather abruptly?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Who were these callers?"

"Mr. Lamotte and his son."

"Had you any reason for thinking that Doctor Heath purposely avoided a meeting with these gentlemen?"

"Not at that time;" flushing slightly.

"Go on, Miss Wardour."

She resumes her story, telling all that she can remember of the call, of Frank's return, and of Sybil's letter.

"About this letter, I would rather not speak, Mr. Wedron; it cannot affect the case."

"It *does* affect the case," he replies quickly "Pray omit no details just here."

She resumes: telling the story of that long day, of Clifford Heath's second visit, and of the news of Sybil Lamotte's flight.

She tells how, at sunset, she opened the strange letter, and how, bewildered and startled out of herself, she put it into Clifford Heath's hands, and called upon him to advise her.

Almost word for word she repeats his comments, and then she hesitates.

"Go on," says Mr. Wedron impatiently; "what happened next?"

Next she tells of the sudden appearance of the strange detective; and here O'Meara seems very much interested, and Mr. Wedron very little.

He does not interrupt her, nor display much interest, until she reaches the point in her narrative when she discovers the loss of Sybil's letter.

"Well!" he cries, as she hesitates once more. "Go on! go on! about that letter."

"Gentlemen," says Constance, contritely, "here, if I could, I would spare myself. When Doctor Heath came, to return the bottle borrowed by the detective, I accused him of taking the letter."

"What!" starting violently; "you suspected him?"

"I insulted him."

"And he—"

"He resented the insult in the only way possible to a gentleman. He accepted it in silence, and turned his back upon me."

"Ah! and since that time?"

"Since that time I have received no intimation that Doctor Heath is aware of my existence."

"Ah-h-h!" ejaculates Mr. Wedron; "and you have not found the letter?"

"No. Its fate remains a mystery."

"Do you still believe that Doctor Heath could account for its disappearance, if he would?"

"On sober second thought, I could see no motive for taking the letter. I was hasty in my accusation. I came to that decision long ago."

"You were deeply grieved over the *mesalliance* of Miss Lamotte?"

"She was my dearest friend."

"Was?" inquiringly.

Constance pales slightly, but does not correct herself.

"Miss Lamotte's strange marriage has been since explained, I believe?"

"*No sir!* not to my satisfaction."

"What! Was it not to save a scapegrace brother?"

"Stop, sir! That scapegrace brother is the one of all that family most worthy your respect and mine. You wish me to tell you of the family, let me begin with Evan."

Beginning where she had dropped her story, Constance goes on. She outlines the visits of the two detectives; she tells how Frank Lamotte received the news of his sister's flight.

Then she paints in glowing, enthusiastic language, the interview with Evan in the garden. She pictures his grief, his rage, his plea that she will stand fast as his sister's friend and champion. She repeats his odd language; describes his sudden change of manner; his declaration that he will find a reason for Sybil's conduct, that shall shield Sybil, and be acceptable to all.

Then she tells how the rumour that Sybil had sacrificed herself for Evan's sake grew and spread, and how the boy had sanctioned the report. How he had come to her the second time to claim her promise, and announce the time for its fulfilment.

"To-day," she says with moist eyes, "Evan Lamotte lies on a drunkard's bed; liquor has been his curse. Morally he is weaker than water; but he has, under all that weakness, the elements that go to make a hero. All that he had, he sacrificed for his sister. Degraded by drink as he was, he could still feel his superiority to the man Burrill; yet, for Sybil's sake, to relieve her of his brutal presence, Evan became his companion, and passed long hours in the society that he loathed."

"Ah!" ejaculates Mr. Wedron; "ah-h-h!" then he closes his lips, and Constance resumes.

She tells next how she became weary of the search for the Wardour diamonds; how she sought to withdraw private detective Belknap; and how that individual had endeavoured to implicate Doctor Heath, and had finally accused him; how she had temporised, and sent for officer Bathurst; and how, during the three days of waiting, she had sent Ray Vandyck to watch over Clifford Heath. She finishes her story without interruption, carrying it up to the very day of the murder. Then she pauses, dreading further questioning.

But Mr. Wedron asks no questions, and makes no comment. He fidgets in his chair, and seems anxious to end the interview.

"Thank you, Miss Wardour," he says, rising briskly, "you have been an invaluable witness; and I feel like telling you that, thanks to you, I hope soon to put my hand upon the guilty party, and open the prison doors for Heath."

She utters a low cry.

"My God! What have I said!" she cries wildly. "Listen, sir; Clifford Heath must and shall, be free; but—you must never drag to justice the true culprit; you *never shall!*"

She is on her feet facing Mr. Wedron, a look of startled defiance in her eyes.

He is gazing at her with the look of a man who has discovered a secret. Suddenly he

comes close beside her, and says, in low, significant tones:

"Let us understand each other; one of two must suffer for this crime. Shall it be Clifford Heath, the innocent, or—*Frank Lamotte?*"

She reels and clutches wildly at a chair for support.

"Frank Lamotte!" she gasps, "*Frank!* Oh! No! No! It must not be him! Oh! You do not understand; you cannot."

She pauses, affrighted and gasping. Then her lips close suddenly, and she struggles fiercely to regain her composure. After a little she turns to Mr. O'Meara, saying:

"You have heard me say that Mr. Bathurst, the detective, and friend of Doctor Heath, was not long since, in W——; he may be here still; I do not know. But he must be found; he is the only man who can do what *must* be done. For I repeat, Dr. Heath must be saved, and the true criminal must *not* be punished. My entire fortune is at your command; find this detective, for my hands are tied; and he *must*, he MUST, find a way to save both guilty and innocent."

"This is getting too deep for me, Wedron," says O'Meara, when the door has closed behind Constance. "What does it lead up to? For I take it your tactics mean something."

Mr. Wedron laughs a low, mellow laugh.

"Things are shaping themselves to my liking," he says, rubbing his hands briskly. "We are almost done floundering, O'Meara. Thanks to Miss Wardour, I know where to put my hand when the right time comes."

"I don't understand."

"You will very soon. Now hear a prophecy: Before to-morrow night, Clifford Heath will send for you, and lay before you a plan for his defence. He will manifest a sudden desire to live."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TWO PASSENGERS WEST.

LATE that night a man is walking slowly up and down the little footpath that leads from the highway, just opposite Mapleton, down to the river, and close past that pretty white boat-house belonging to the Lamotte domain.

He is very patient, very tranquil in his movements, and quite unconscious that, crouched in the shadow not far away, a small figure notes his every action.

Presently a second form emerges from the gloom that hangs over the gates of Mapleton, and comes down toward the river. Just beside the boat-house it pauses and waits the man's approach.

The new comer is a woman. The night is not so dark but that her form is distinctly visible to the hidden watcher.

"Well," says the man, coming close beside her, "I am here, madam."

"Yes," whispers the woman. "Have you—" she hesitates.

"Accomplished my task?" he finishes the sentence. "Have you not proof up yonder that the work is done?"

The woman trembles from head to foot, and draws farther away.

"I am only waiting to receive what is now due me," the man resumes. "You need have no fears as to the future; like Abraham, you have been provided with a lamb for the sacrifice."

Again a shudder shakes the form of the woman, but she does not speak.

"I must trouble you to do me a favour, Mrs. Burrill," the man goes on. "It is necessary that I should see the honourable Mr. Lamotte. So, if you will be so good as to admit me to Mapleton to-night, under cover of this darkness, and contrive an interview without disturbing the other inmates, you will greatly oblige me; but first, my two thousand dollars, if you please."

With a sudden movement the woman flings back the cloak that has been drawn close about her face, and strikes with her hand upon the timbers of the boat-house.

There is a crackling sound, a flash of light, and then the slow blaze of a parlour match.

By its light they gaze upon each other, and then the man mutters a curse.

"Miss Wardour!"

"Mr. Belknap, it is I."

There is a moment's silence, and then she speaks again:

"You are disappointed, Mr. Belknap; you expected to meet another, who would pay you your price for—you know what. You will not see that other one; she is hovering between life and death, and her delirious ravings have revealed you in your true character. You may wonder how I have dared thus to brave an assassin, a blackmailer. I am not reckless. If I do not return in ten minutes, safe and sound, the boat-house will be speedily searched and you, Mr. Belknap, will be hunted as you may have hunted others. Not long since you

made terms with me; you attempted coercion, I might say blackmail; to-night it is in my power to bridle your tongue, and I tell you, that unless you leave W—— at once, you will find yourself a resident here against your will. Consider your business in W—— at an end. This is not a safe place for you."

With the last words on her lips, she turns and speeds swiftly back toward Mapleton, and Jerry Belknap, private detective, stands transfixed, gazing at the spot from which she has fled, and muttering curses not good to hear.

He makes no attempt to follow her. He recognizes the fact that he is baffled, and, for the time at least, defeated. Grinding out curses as he goes, he turns his steps toward W——.

Then, from out the shadows of the boat-house a small bundle uncoils itself, stands erect, and then moves forward as if in pursuit.

But, something else rises up from the ground, directly in the path of this small shadow; a long, slender body displays itself, and a voice whispers close to the ears of the smaller watcher:

"Remain here, George, and keep a close eye on the house. I will look after *him*."

Then the shadows separate; the taller one follows in the wake of the disconsolate detective.

The other, scaling the park palings like a cat, vanishes in the darkness that surrounds Mapleton.

The reflections of Jerry Belknap, private detective, as he goes, with moody brow and tightly compressed lips, across the pretty river bridge, and back towards his hotel, are far from pleasant.

He is a shrewd man, and has engineered many a knotty case to a successful issue, thereby covering himself with glory. This was in the past, however; in the days when he had been regularly attached to a strong and reliable detective agency.

For tact, energy, ambition, he had no peer; but one day his career had been nipped in the bud.

A young man, equally talented, and far more honourable, had caused his overthrow, and yet had saved him from the worst that might have befallen him. And Jerry Belknap had stepped down from an honourable position, and, determined to make his power, experience, and acknowledged abilities serve him as the means of supplying his somewhat extravagant needs, had resolved himself into a "private detective," and betaken himself to "ways that are dark."

"There's something at the bottom of this business that I don't understand," mused he as he paced onward, little thinking how soon he is to be enlightened on this and sundry other subjects. "I never felt more sanguine of bringing a crooked operation to a successful termination, and I never yet made such an abject failure. I shall make it my business to find out, and at once, what is this power behind the throne. So, according to Miss Wardour—may Satan fly away with her—I am not to approach the Lamottes, I am to lose my reward, I am to retire from the field like a whipped cur. Miss Wardour, we shall see about that."

"Call me for the early train going west," he says to the night clerk, on reaching the hotel. "Let me see, what is the hour?"

"The western train leaves very early, sir—at four twenty. Then you won't be here to witness Burrill's funeral? It will call everybody out. The circumstances attending the man's life and death will make it an event for W——."

"It's an 'event' that won't interest me. If I have been rightly informed, the man is better, placed in his coffin, than he ever was in his boots. I shall leave my baggage here—all but a small valise. I expect to return to W—— soon. If anything occurs to change my plans, I will telegraph you and have it forwarded."

At this moment the door of the office opens and closes noisily, and a man comes rather unsteadily toward them. It is Smith, the book-peddler, and evidently much intoxicated.

"Hallo, Smith," says the night clerk, jocosely, as Mr. Belknap turns away, "you seem to have rheumatism, and I suspect you find more fun than business in W——."

"Town ain't much on literature," retorts Mr. Smith, amiably, "but it's the devil and all for draw poker. I've raked in a pot, and I'm going on to the next pious town, so—

'If you are waking, call me early.'

Old Top, I'm going west."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SOME EXCELLENT ADVICE.

EARLY on the following morning, there was unusual stir about Mapleton. John Burrill

was to be buried that day, and the sad funeral preparations were going on. People were moving about, making the bustle the more noticeable by their visible efforts to step softly, and by the low monotonous hum of their voices.

Up stairs, the usual quiet reigned.

Sybil was sleeping under the influence of powerful opiates, administered to insure her against the possibility of being overheard in her ravings, or of waking to a realisation of the events taking place below stairs.

Evan, too, had been quieted by the use of brandy and morphine, and Mrs. Lamotte kept watch at his bedside, while Constance, in Sybil's chamber, maintained a similar vigil. Neither of the two watchers manifested any interest in the funeral preparations, nor did they feel any.

"I shall not be present at the burial," Mrs. Lamotte had said to her husband, "Sybil's illness and Evan's will furnish sufficient excuse, and—nothing constrains me to do honour to John Burrill *now*."

Mr. Lamotte opened his lips to remonstrate, but catching a look upon the face of his wife that he had learned to its fullest meaning, he closed them again and went grimly below stairs, and, through all the day previous to the departure of the funeral cortege, Jasper Lamotte was the only member of that aristocratic family who was visible to the curious gaze of the strangers who attended upon the burial preparations. Early in the forenoon an unexpected delegation arrived at the entrance of Mapleton.

First, came Doctor Benoit, driving alone in his time-honoured gig, the only vehicle he had been seen to enter within the memory of W——.

Close behind him, a carriage containing four gentlemen, all manifestly persons of more than ordinary importance: Mr. O'Meara, in fact, his colleague of the New York Bar, and two elderly, self-possessed strangers, evidently city men.

They desired a few words with Mr. Lamotte, and that gentleman, after some hesitation and no little concern as to the nature of their business at such a time, presented himself before them, looking the personification of subdued sorrow and haughty reserve.

Mr. O'Meara acted as spokesman for the party.

"Mr. Lamotte," he began, with profound politeness and marked coldness of manner and speech, "I should apologise for our intrusion at such a time were it not that our errand is one of gravest importance and can not be put off. Allow me to introduce to you Mr. Wedron, Doctor Gaylor, and Professor Harrington, all of New York."

Mr. Lamotte recognised the strangers with haughty courtesy, and silently awaited disclosures.

"Mr. Wedron and myself, as the representatives and counsel of Doctor Heath, have summoned from the city these two gentlemen, whom you must know by reputation, and we desire that they be allowed to examine the body of Mr. Burrill, in order to ascertain if the wounds upon the body were actually made by the knife found with it."

The countenance of Mr. Lamotte darkened perceptibly.

"It seems to me," he said, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "that this is an unwarrantable and useless proceeding—doubly so at this late hour."

"Nevertheless, it is a necessary one," broke in Mr. Wedron, crisply. "It is presumable that you can have no personal enmity against Doctor Heath, sir; therefore you can have no reason for opposing measures instigated by justice. The examination will be a brief one."

The resolute tone of his voice, no less than his words, brought Jasper Lamotte to his senses.

"Certainly, I have no wish to oppose the ends of justice," he said, in a tone which, in spite of himself, was most ungracious. "Such an investigation is naturally distasteful to me. Nevertheless, you may proceed, gentlemen, but I should not like the ladies of my household to discover what is going on. They are sufficiently nervous already. If you will excuse me for a moment, I will go up and request them to remain in their rooms for the present. After that, you are at liberty to proceed."

They all seat themselves gravely, and Mr. Lamotte, taking this as a quiet acquiescence, goes out, and softly but swiftly up the broad stairs; not to the rooms occupied by the ladies, however, but straight on to Frank's room, where that young man has remained in solitude, ever since his unusually early breakfast hour.

"Frank," he says, entering quietly and closing the door with great care. "Frank, we have a delegation of doctors below stairs."

"A delegation of doctors?" Frank repeats, parrot-like.

"Precisely; they want to examine the body."

Frank comes slowly to his feet.

"To examine the body!" he repeats again. "In Heaven's name, *why?*"

"To ascertain, by examining the wounds on the body, if the knife found with it is the knife that killed."

A sickly hue overspreads Frank Lamotte's face, and he sits weakly down in the chair from which he has just risen, saying never a word.

"Frank," says Jasper Lamotte, eying his son sharply. "Do you see any reason why this investigation should not take place; supposing that it were yet in our power to hinder it?"

A silence that lasts many seconds, then:

"It is *not* in our power to hinder it," says Frank, in a hollow voice; "neither would it be policy. Let the play go on," and he turns his face away with a weary gesture.

For a moment, Jasper Lamotte stands gazing at his son; a puzzled look on his face; then he turns and goes out as softly as he came.

"Gentlemen," he says, re-entering the library, with the same subdued manner, "you are at liberty to proceed with your examination, and, if I may suggest, it is as well to lose no time. The funeral takes place at two o'clock."

They rise simultaneously, and without more words, follow Jasper Lamotte to the room of death.

At the door, Mr. Wedron halts.

"I will remain on the balcony," he says to Mr. O'Meara, but sufficiently loud to be heard by all the rest; "I never could endure the sight of a corpse." And he turns abruptly, and goes out through the open doorway; taking up a position on the broad piazza and turning his gaze toward the river.

Jasper Lamotte is less sensitive, however; he enters with the others, and stands beside O'Meara, while the physicians do their work.

"At least," he thinks, "I'll know what they are about, and what their verdict is."

But in this he is disappointed. They have brought with them a surgeon's knife, the precise counterpart of the one now in possession of the prosecution, and of the same manufacture.

One by one they examine, they compare, they probe, and all in silence. Then they turn toward O'Meara.

"I believe we have finished," says Professor Harrington.

"And the result?" asks Jasper Lamotte, eagerly, in spite of himself.

"That," replies Mr. O'Meara, with elaborate *nonchalance*, "will be made known at the trial. Mr. Lamotte, we trust that you will pardon this most necessary intrusion, and we wish you a very good morning."

The examination has been a brief affair; it is just ten o'clock when the four unwelcome guests drive away.

Dr. Benoit does not accompany them; he goes up-stairs to visit his patients.

Jasper Lamotte asks him no questions. He knows that Dr. Benoit is a man of honour and that he will keep his professional secrets. So he goes sulkily back to his library.

Two hours later a rough, uncouth-looking man appears at the servants' entrance, and asks to see Mr. Lamotte.

"I'm one of his workmen," he says, very gravely, "and I want to see him particular."

Jasper Lamotte is in no mood for receiving visitors, but he is, just now, in a position where he cannot, with safety, follow the dictates of his haughty nature.

He is filled with suspicion; surrounded by a mystery he cannot fathom; and, a man who begs for an audience at such an hour must have an extraordinary errand. Reasoning thus, he says, crustily:

"Show the fellow here."

A moment later the man shuffles into the room. Mr. Lamotte glances up, and his brow darkens ominously.

"Brooks!" he exclaims. "What the mischief—" he checks himself, then adds, ungraciously: "What do *you* want?"

"Mr. Lamotte, I beg your pardon, sir," says the man, a trifle thickly. "I came back to W—— last night, and heard of the awful things as has happened here. Now, I always liked Burrill, in spite of his weakness, for *I* ain't the man to criticise such failin's. I've been down among the factory people, and I've heard them talk; and, thinks I to myself, there's some things as Mr. Lamotte ought to know. You've always paid me my wages sir, and treated me fair; and I believe you've treated all the hands the same; but—there's *some* people as must always have their fling at everybody, as the Lord has seen fit to set over their heads; and—there's some of them sort in Mill Avenue."

During this harangue the countenance of

Jasper Lamotte has grown supercilious, but not less curious.

"Explain yourself, Brooks," he says, quite graciously, and with some inward uneasiness. "I do not comprehend your meaning."

"If I had come to your servants and asked to see the body of my old chum," begins Brooks, with a knowing look, and drawing near Mr. Lamotte, "they would have ordered me off, and shut the door in my face; so I just asked to see *you* on business. But if you was to ring your bell, by and by, and order one of your servants to take me in to look at the corpse, I could explain to them what an old friend I was, and that would settle the curiosity business."

"Doesn't it strike you, Brooks, that you don't cut much of a figure, to appear as the friend of my son-in-law?" questions Mr. Lamotte, looking some disfavour at the *ensemble* before him.

Brooks buries his chin in his bosom, in order to survey his soiled linen; looks down at his dingy boots; runs his fingers through his shock of coarse red hair.

"I ain't much of a feller to look at; but that's because I ain't been as lucky as Burrill was; though I ain't anxious to change places with him now. I'll fix the friendship business to suit you, sir, and be proper respectful about it. Say Burrill was my boss, or something of that sort. I shouldn't like to have certain parties to know my *real* business here, and I *should* like to take a look at Burrill on my own account."

There is a ring of sarcasm in the first words of this speech, and Mr. Lamotte reflects that he has not yet learned his errand.

"Very good, Brooks, you shall see the body, and manage the rest as delicately as possible, please. You know we want no ill spoken of the dead. Now, then, your real business, for," consulting his watch, "time presses."

"I know it does, sir, and I won't waste any words. You see, sir, beggin' your pardon for mentionin' of it, Burrill has got another wife, a divorced one, I mean, livin' down at the avenue. She works in Story's mill now, but she used to work in yours before—"

"Yes, yes," impatiently. "Get on faster, Brooks."

"Well, you see, sir, since her husband—I mean since *Mr. Burrill* was killed, she has been cuttin' up rough, and lettin' out a many things as you wouldn't like to have get all over W——. She ain't afraid of him no more (he did beat her monstrous), and when she gets to takin' on, she lets out things that would sound bad about your son-in-law. If it was a common chap like me, it wouldn't matter; but I thinks to myself, now, Brooks, this 'ere woman who can't hold her tongue will be hauled up as a witness for Doctor Heath. I ain't got nothing against Doctor Heath, but I says, it will be awful humblin' to Mr. Lamotte's pride, and powerful hard on his pretty daughter; so I jest come to say that if Nance Burrill could be got to go away, quiet like, before the other parties could get their hands on her, why, it would be a good thing, Mr. Lamotte."

Considering the tender solicitude he feels for "Mr. Lamotte's pride," he has given it some pretty hard knocks, but he looks quite innocent, and incapable of any sinister intent, and Mr. Lamotte, after gnawing his lip viciously for a moment and favouring his *vis-à-vis* with a sharp glance of suspicion, says, with sudden condescension:

"Brooks, I've always been inclined to believe you a pretty good sort of fellow, but this singular disinterestedness almost makes me suspect your motive. Stop," as Brooks elevates his head and suddenly faces toward the door. "Hear me out. Brooks, don't be ashamed to confess it. Did the thought of a reward stimulate you to do me this—favour?"

"If it's a favour, sir, you take it very uppish," retorts Brooks sulkily, and edging slowly toward the door. "I'm a poor man, sir, but I ain't bad enough to come to you with a trumped-up story, and if I happened to think that in case you found things as I tell you, you might reward me by and by with a ten-dollar note, why, I don't think there is much harm in that. I liked you and your ways, and wanted to do you a good turn, and if I wanted to do myself a good turn, too, why, there's nater in that."

"There's nature in that, true enough. Brooks, I wish I had time to hear all the particulars of this affair."

"I don't want to give them, sir," replies the man, hastily. "No more would it be fair for me to do so. I've got some fair friends among the Mill Avenue folks. I've come back to W——, because I couldn't get on anywhere else; and I've come back broke. The factory folks will trust me to a night's lodging, when their betters wouldn't. I've

told you enough to open your eyes, sir; and you can look into the thing for yourself."

To "look into the thing" for himself, is precisely what Jasper Lamotte is not inclined to do; so he says, with growing conviction, and increasing friendliness of manner:

"At least, Brooks, you can give me an idea of the nature of the stories this woman will tell, if brought into court?"

"The Lord knows what she wouldn't tell, sir; she blows hot, and blows cold. One minute she tell show he was a fairly good husband, until he got into the hands of some city gang, while they lived in New York; and next she raves over all his misdeeds, tells how he was compelled to quit England, or be jugged up: how he forced her into divorcing him; how he bragged over the strong influence he had over you and all your family; how he came to her house time and again, after he was married to your gal; and how he promised her 'pots of old Lamotte's money;' them's her words, sir, 'pots of old Lamotte's money, and heaps of diamonds, for the sake of old times,' when he was drunk enough to be good-natured; and how he beat her, and I can testify to that, when he was a little drunker."

"Brooks," says Mr. Lamotte, springing a last trap; "do you suppose *you* could manage this business of getting away the woman, if I paid you well, and gave you a bribe for her?"

"No, sir. I couldn't do it. I am so well known about Mill Avenue; it won't do for a poor broke-up devil to turn up flush all at once. I don't want nothing to do with the affair. I've done all I can do."

Mr. Lamotte slowly draws forth his wallet, and slowly opens it.

"Brooks, here is twenty-five dollars; I've not much money by me; I'll look into this matter, and do more for you after we get quiet again. Meantime, you can have the first vacancy at the factory; I'll see to that at once."

"And I'll try and be sober, sir, and ready for it. Now, then, I've been here a good many minutes; you'd better let me take a look at the corpse, and be off."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BELKNAP OUTWITTED.

"If you please, Mr. Lamotte," said that gentleman's coachman, appearing before his master, less than an hour before the time appointed for the moving of the funeral cortege, and looking much confused, "if you please, sir, I've had a misfortune with my hand, sir; at least, my wrist; it's sort of sprained, and I most fear I can't handle the reins proper, for the horses is mighty full of life, bein' so little used of late."

"Well, well," broke in Mr. Lamotte. "I suppose you can get a man to fill your place?"

The man's countenance brightened at once.

"Oh, yes, sir; I've the very man right on hand. A friend of mine, and a master one with horses."

"Let him take your place then, and see that every thing is in proper order."

"It's all right," said the coachman, returning to the stables, and addressing a man who leaned against the loose box, where two blooded carriage horses were undergoing the currying process. "It's all right; you can drive the horses."

"Cap'n you're a good fellow," said the man, enthusiastically, "and here's your ten dollars. It's a favour I'll never forget, mind, for many's the day I've driven the beauties, before Squire McInnis went up, and we all had to go."

"That was a big failure," replied the coachman, knowingly. "You just see that the horses are done off all right, won't you? I must look after the carriage."

"It was lucky for me that I happened to know the history of these horses," mused Jerry Belknap, for he it was who leaned confidingly over to stroke the sleek sides of one of the splendid bays, and who had bribed Mr. Lamotte's coachman with a ten-dollar bill. "If I drive the Lamottes, I'm sure of a hearing, and no audience; at the worst if they should take in a third party, but they won't, I can find a way to make myself and my wants known." And he sauntered across to the carriage house and critically inspected the splendid landau that was being rolled out upon the gravel.

He had returned to W—— on foot, from a near railway station, reaching the town within five hours from the time he had left it.

During this time, however, his personal appearance had undergone a marked change. He was rubicund, and more youthful of countenance; shabbily smart in dress; excessively "horsey," and somewhat loud in manner.

During his intercourse with the Lamottes

he had learned, from Frank, that their blooded bays had once been the property of a wealthy and prominent citizen of New York, who having failed, after the modern fashion, had given Jasper Lamotte the first bid for the valuable span. Given thus much, the rest was easy. Representing himself as a former coachman of this bankrupt New Yorker, he had told his little story. He was looking about him for a place in which to open a "small, but neat" livery stable, had wandered into W—— that morning, and having considerable cash about him, all his savings in fact, he had not cared to tempt robbers, by appearing too "high toned."

Of course he had heard at once of the murder, and then remembered that Lamotte was the name of the gentleman who had bought his favourite horses from his former master.

"I never pulled reins over a span equal to 'em," he said, with much pathos. "I never had the same liking for any other pair of critters; they was the apple of my eye, and I'd give just ten dollars to draw reins over 'em once more—even to a funeral."

His little ruse was successful; the bait was instantly swallowed, and Jerry Belknap glanced maliciously up at the closed curtained chamber windows, and muttered, as he began to saunter slowly up and down before the stable door:

"Miss Wardour, you won't find it so easy to outwit an old detective, even with the odds in your favour."

Just as the horses were being led out from the stable, a quiet-looking young man, with a somewhat rustic air, came into the yard, and approached the group near the carriage house.

"Who comes here?" asked the disguised Belknap, in a low tone, addressing the coachman.

"More than I know," replied that functionary. Then laying down a halter, just removed from the head of one of the pawing, restless horses, he turned toward the new comer, saying, patronizingly:

"Well, my man, can we do anything for you?"

The stranger appeared somewhat abashed.

"I hope I ain't in the way, gentlemen," he said, respectfully; "I came from Wardour with a message for Miss Constance. It's from the old lady, and as I see the carriages are coming and the hearse, I just thought I'd wait till the funeral was gone before I intruded."

"Oh!" said the coachman, more graciously. "Well, you won't have long to wait, then; the time's about up, and Mr. Lamotte is never behind time." Then he turned to Mr. Belknap.

"You must keep a close eye over the off one," he said; "he's full of Cain; and I say, what a lucky thing it is that your clothes are dark, and that Mrs. Lamotte won't let us wear full liveries."

"Why, yes, it's very lucky, that's so; just throw over those reins, will you. Don't be uneasy in you mind about that horse; I'll drive 'em safe enough; just you tell me when to start."

Ten minutes later, all that remained of John Burrill was borne out in its costly casket and placed in the splendid hearse at the door.

Just as he was about to cross his own threshold, Jasper Lamotte was confronted by a young man who pressed into his hand a slip of paper, and whispered in his ear:

"Read it at once, sir; it's of vital importance *to you*."

Stifling an exclamation, Jasper Lamotte unfolded and glanced at the slip of paper. It contained these words:

The man who will drive your carriage is a cursed New York detective, who has bribed your coachman.

Don't give him the opportunity he hopes to gain for watching and listening to yourself and son.

The bearer of this can be trusted.

BELKNAP.

By the time he had mastered the meaning of the note, the hearse had moved forward and the pall-bearers were taking their places.

Then the Lamotte carriage came into view. Mr. Lamotte placed the note in the hand of his son, who stood close beside him, and descended the steps, a stern look on his face.

"My friend, come down off that box," he said to the self-satisfied substitute procured him by his coachman.

The man on the box stared down at him in amazement.

"But, sir," he began.

"I want no words from you, sir; you can't drive my horses. Come down instantly."

The discomforted Belknap writhed in his seat, and looked about him helplessly.

Before were the pall-bearers, looking back from their open vehicle, and noting the scene; on the steps, and within easy hearing distance, were gathered the small knot of gentlemen,

who, for courtesy's sake, or for policy's sake, had gathered to do honour to Mr. Lamotte, rather than to the poor rosewood-shrouded thing that had never a mourner.

He could not explain; he could not make himself known.

"I will have you thrown off that box, sir, if you hesitate ten seconds longer," exclaimed Mr. Lamotte, impatiently, at the same time moving away and beckoning to the driver of the next carriage.

Fate was against him, and muttering curses, "not loud but deep," Jerry Belknap began to clamber reluctantly down.

Seeing this, Mr. Lamotte turned toward the bearer of the mischievous note, who had withdrawn a few paces from the group near the carriage, and beckoned him to approach.

He came forward, promptly.

"Can you drive, my man?"

"Yes, sir," respectfully.

"Then do me the favour to mount that box and drive my horses this afternoon. And you, sir," turning to poor Belknap, "get off my premises and keep off."

And so it came about that Jerry Belknap, private detective, found himself once more outwitted, and "Mr. Smith, the book peddler," drove the carriage containing John Burrill's chief mourners.

"Pardon this little scene, gentlemen," said Mr. Lamotte, turning to his friends, "but I happen to know that the man I dismissed is drunk."

Half an hour later a servant tapped softly at the door where Constance kept watch, and said:

"There's a boy below, Miss Wardour, who says he has an important message for you, and must deliver it in person."

Constance went immediately down to find our old friend George, the image boy, in the hall below.

She smiled at sight of him, hoping to obtain some news of Bathurst. But he only bowed, as if to a queen, placed in her hand a small sealed envelope; and before she could utter a word, she was standing alone in the crape-hung hall, while the boy's steps could be heard ringing on the stones outside.

Standing there, Constance hastily opened the envelope. It contained a letter and a scrap of paper. Glancing first at the scrap, she read these words:

MISS WARDOUR—

Enclosed find a letter, which, for reasons which I shall explain later, I pilfered from you on the night of our first meeting. It has accomplished the purpose for which I took it, and I hasten to restore it. BATHURST.

Constance turned her eye once more upon the paper in her hand, looked closer and exclaimed: "It is; it is Sybil's lost letter!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WILL LOVE OUTWEIGH HONOUR?"

"DR. HEATH, here is another visitor."

Clifford Heath turned slowly away from the small iron-barred window; he looked a trifle disturbed by this announcement, for he had just been interviewed by Mr. O'Meara, who for the first time had presented Mr. Wedron, and the two had left him much to think about.

The look of annoyance left his face, however, and a stare of surprise took its place, when, following upon the footsteps of the janitor, came Constance Wardour, not closely veiled and drooping, after the manner of prison-visiting females in orthodox novels, but with her fair face unconcealed, and her graceful figure at its proudest poise.

The haughtiness all departed from face and bearing, however, when the door closed behind her and she found herself alone with the man she had falsely accused. Misfortune had not humbled Clifford Heath. When the first momentary look of surprise had left his face he stood before her as proudly erect, as icily courteous, as if he were receiving her in his own parlour.

"Doctor Heath," began Constance, in low, contrite tones, "some months ago I brought a wrongful accusation against you. I wronged you deeply; let me do myself the justice to say that almost immediately I was convinced of the injustice I had done you, of the utter insanity of my own behaviour, but—" blushing rosily, "I never found the letter, and how could I come to you and say, 'I have changed my mind,' without a reason. Less than an hour ago, this note was put into my hands, and with it that unfortunate lost letter. This enables me to say,—Doctor Heath, I deeply regret the insult I offered you, and I ask you to be magnanimous, and to pardon me."

She put the note in his hand, and he read it, without uttering a word; stood silent for a moment, as if to collect his thoughts, and then said:

"Miss Wardour, I am glad that this affair has been so far cleared up; when a man has so many dark shadows hanging over him he is thankful for the smallest glimpse of sunlight. It is like your generosity to come in person."

"But you have not said that you forgive me, Doctor Heath: fully and freely, remember."

"Fully and freely I forgive you then, Miss Wardour," smilingly, he replied. "After all, the mistake was a natural one. Since I have been an inmate of this cell, I have learned to see myself as others see me. Why should I not come under suspicion, especially after hearing my words to Bathurst? By the by, this note from Bathurst, you tell me that you received it to-day?"

"To-day; since noon."

"And it is dated to-day; then," looking at her questioningly, "Bathurst must be in town."

"Yes," dropping her eyes, confusedly. "That is, I think so;" and, scarcely heeding her own movements, she seated herself in the doctor's chair, and, leaning one arm against the table, looked up into his face, saying, with a spice of her old manner, so familiar to him in the past:

"Having forgiven me so generously, Doctor Heath, don't you think it would be quite proper to shake hands?"

He looked down upon her, a strange light leaping into his eyes. But he did not approach. He lifted a large, shapely hand, and surveyed it sorrowfully.

"It *looks* as clean as any hand, Miss Wardour, but there is a stain upon it."

"A stain! No, sir. Do you think that *I* believe in your guilt?"

Again the quick light flamed in his eyes, and now he came a step nearer.

"Do you believe in my innocence?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"When I said 'there is a stain upon my hand,' I did not mean the stain of guilt, but of suspicion, of accusation."

"There is *no* stain upon your hand, Doctor Heath. What is this I hear about you? They tell me you will make no defence."

He smiled down at her.

"I could make but one defence, and that—"

"And that?"

"And that, Miss Wardour, I would not make."

"Why?"

She was straining every nerve to preserve her composure; words came from her lips like frozen heart-beats.

"Because—Miss Wardour, do not ask me why."

"I do ask; I persist. Why? Why? *Why?*"

"Because—I see you are as imperious as ever—because I can only save myself by giving the real murderer up to justice."

She was on her feet in an instant, all her enforced calmness gone, unutterable misery in her face and voice.

"You know!" she cried. "You! Oh! my God, what shall I do!"

"Have no fear, Miss Wardour; have I not said I will keep my own counsel?"

"But, you! *You!* Oh, there is no reason why *you* should not speak: you are not bound! You are not—oh, what am I saying!" She sank back into her seat, panting and wild-eyed.

"Miss Wardour, calm yourself," he said, gently. "I *am* bound. It is my pleasure to keep this secret. Listen. A short time ago I received a visit from my lawyers. They told me—among other things they thought it best that I should know—that you knew who did the deed, and that you would have us both saved, innocent and guilty alike. Before that, I had determined to keep silence; now I am doubly resolved. For your sake, I will not accuse Frank Lamotte."

"Frank—you will not accuse *Frank Lamotte!* And for my sake!" she almost shrieked. "For God's sake, explain. What is Frank Lamotte to me? Of what can you accuse him?"

It was Clifford Heath's turn to lose his composure. How could he interpret her words? Was she trying to deceive him?

"Miss Wardour," he said, almost sternly, "do you wish me to understand that Francis Lamotte is nothing to you?"

"*Nothing to me!* the vilest, the basest, the most treacherous, the most abject of all human creatures, *that* is what Frank Lamotte is to me!"

Uncontrollable scorn rang in her voice; rising anger, too. How dared *he* couple her name with that of Frank Lamotte?

From the chaos of meanings and mysteries revolving through his mind, Clifford Heath seized upon and clung to one idea, held it in silence for a moment, then let it burst forth in words:

"Then—then you are not Frank Lamotte's promised wife?"

"*I!* great heavens! *no.*"

"And never have been?"

"And never have been."

Clifford Heath drew a long, deep breath. For a moment a look of sadness beamed in his eye, then it died out suddenly, as he said, almost gloomily:

"And yet, you have said that he must be saved at all hazards. Knowing his guilt, I still am here in his place."

"In his place! Oh," she came toward him with a swift, eager movement, "I begin to see! Doctor Heath, you think Frank Lamotte is the guilty one?"

"I know it," grimly.

A look of relief came over her face. She breathed freely.

"You believe this," she said at last, "and yet you are here. If you have evidence against Frank Lamotte, why do you occupy a felon's cell? Why not put him in your place?"

"I have told you why. It was for your sake."

She lowered her eyes and drew back a little, but he followed her, and standing before her, looked down into her face with a persistent, searching gaze. "You must understand me now," he said firmly. "When I believed that you loved Frank Lamotte, I said 'Then I will not stand forth and accuse the man she loves, for—I love her, and she must not be unhappy.'"

A great sob rose in her throat. A wave of crimson swept over her brow. She stood before him with clasped hands and drooping head.

"But for that meddlesome slip of paper," he went on, "I should not have been driven from the field, and this treachery of Lamotte's could not have been practiced upon me. Do you remember a certain day when you sent for Ray Vandyck, and he came to you from my office? Well, on that day Francis Lamotte told me that you were his promised wife, and when Ray came back, *he* verified the statement, having received the information from your lips. Once I hoped to come to you and say, after lifting for your eyes the veil of mystery which I have allowed to envelop my past: 'Constance Wardour, I love you; I want you for my very own, my wife!' Now, mountains have arisen between us; I can not offer you a hand with a shadow of a stain upon it; nor a name that is tarnished by doubt and suspicion. However this affair may end for me, that hope is ended now."

It had come; the decisive moment.

She could go away now with sealed lips, and it would end indeed. She could turn away from him, leaving happiness behind her; taking with her his happiness, too; or she could speak, and then—

She looked about her; and the bare walls and grated windows gave her strength to dare much. Had they stood together out under the broad bright sunlight, he as free as herself, she could have turned away mutely, and let her life go on as it would.

Now—now his present was overshadowed, his future difficult to read.

"*Is* it ended?" she said, softly. Then, looking up with sudden, charming imperiousness. "You end things very selfishly, very coolly, Doctor Heath. I do not choose to have it ended."

"Miss Wardour!—Constance!"

"Wait; you say that your lawyers told of my visit to them, and that I would not have the guilty punished. What more did they tell you—about my doings?"

"Very little; I could hardly understand why they told thus much."

"Did they tell you that I learned, through a scheming rascal in the guise of a detective, that a plot was growing against you; that I sent for Ray Vandyck, and set him over you as a temporary guardian? And that I sent next for Dective Bathurst, warning him that you were surrounded by enemies? Did they tell you that, when I learned of your arrest, I left my place by Sybil Lamotte, who is delirious and yet clings to me constantly, and came to them, offering them all my fortune if they would only save me you?"

"Did you do this—Constance?"

"I have done this. Have I not earned the right, openly, before all the world, to be your champion, your truest friend, your—"

"My queen! my darling! my very own!"

All his calm is gone, all his haughtiness of bearing; with one swift movement he snatches her to his heart, and she rests in his embrace, shocked at her own boldness and unspeakably happy.

Who dare intrude upon a lover's interview?

Who dares to snatch the first coy love words from a maiden's lips, and give them to a world grown old in love making, and

appraising each tender word by its own calloused old heart?

For the time all is forgotten, save one fact, they love each other well.

By and by, other thoughts came, forcing their way like unwelcome guests.

"Constance," he says, after a long interval, "you have made me anything but indifferent to my fate. Now I shall begin to struggle for my freedom; but—do you realise what a network of false testimony they have woven about me?"

"Do I realise it?" she cried. "Yes, far more than you do, or can, and—you said something about Frank Lamotte. Has he sought to injure you?"

"Constance, I thought you knew," turning upon her a look of surprise. "I thought you knew his guilt. Who, but Frank Lamotte, could gain access to my office, to purloin my handkerchief and my knife? He had a duplicate key, and—*I found that key in the old cellar beside the body of John Burrill.*"

The look of perplexity on her face deepens into one of actual distress.

Could it be, that after all, Frank had forestalled that other one?

Back upon her memory came his words, "I can save him if I will." Where there is room for doubt there is room for hope. What if another hand had anticipated that of the paid assassin? She resolved to cling to this hope with desperation.

If there was evidence so strong against Frank Lamotte, let him take her lover's place. Why not? She began to see many things in a new light; she peered forward, catching a view of the partial truth, "as in a glass, darkly." One thing was clear, however, they must act at once! No time must be lost!

She sat before him thinking thus, yet seemingly powerless to act or speak!

"Constance. Has the possibility of Frank Lamotte's guilt, ovewhelmed you?"

"The possibility!" she exclaimed, starting up suddenly. "No. I know him capable of baser things than murder."

"Of baser things! My darling, what do you mean?"

"Don't ask me now; there is no time to waste in talking of him; I am going straight to your lawyers this moment; I am going to send them to you, and you shall tell them everything."

"Despot!" His eyes devouring her.

"Of course! I am always that. They will say it is time some one took you in charge. Are you going to be dumb any more?"

"Never! My lips are unsealed from this hour; since you have dared to claim and take a share in my fate, and since I have not the courage to put so much happiness from me."

"Supposing it in your power?"

"Oh, I know better than to cope with you," smiling upon her fondly. "But my honour must be vindicated for your gracious sake, and—I must cease to be," with a side-long glance, "'Doctor Heath, from nowhere.' Sit down, darling; our janitor is an accommodating fellow; he will not interrupt, nor shorten your stay, I am sure. I want to tell you my story. It is yours, together with all my other secrets."

She put up her hand, quickly.

"Not now," she said. "Not for a long time. I prefer you as I have known you; for me, you shall still be 'Doctor Heath, from nowhere.' Don't remonstrate; I will have it so; I will send Mr. O'Meara to you, and that odd Mr. Wedron; your shall tell *them* all about yourself."

"*You* will go to them? Constance, no, for your own sake, let us keep our love a secret for a time; until this is ended, somehow. Think, my proud darling, how much it would spare you."

She turned toward him, her mouth settling into very firm lines, a resolute look in her eyes.

"Would it spare you anything?" she asked, quietly.

"I? Oh, no. It is sacrifice for me; but, I wish to have it so. You must not visit me here. You must not let gossip say she has thrown herself away on an adventurer."

"I won't," she replied, senteniously; "I'd like to hear of anybody saying that! I'd excommunicate them. I'm going to close the mouths of gossips, by setting my seal of proprietorship upon you. I'm coming here every day; but, after this, I'll bring Aunt Honor, or Mrs. O'Meara with me. I'm going to say to every soul who names you to me: 'Doctor Heath is my affianced husband, defame him if you dare.' And I'm going straight to tell Mr. O'Meara that he must take your testimony against Frank Lamotte."

Constance kept her word. Before many days, the town rang with the news that Constance Wardour, in the face of the accusation

against him, had announced her engagement to Doctor Clifford Heath.

Then a hush fell upon the aristocratic gossippers of W—— and mischievous tongues were severely bridled. It was not wise to censure too freely a man whom the heiress of Wardour had marked with her favour.

The lawyers found their client in a mood much more to their liking, and O'Meara scribbled down in his little book long sentences caught from the lips of Clifford Heath, who was now a strong helper, and apt in suggestions for the defence.

He opened for them the sealed-up pages of his past life.

He told them in detail, all that he had briefly stated to Constance, concerning Frank Lamotte, and more.

Every day now they were in close consultation, and every day the Wardour carriage drove at a stated hour, first to Mapleton, where it took up Constance, and then to the prison, where, accompanied by her aunt, or her guardian's wife, the heiress passed a half-hour in the cell of her lover.

She still clung to the hope that the accumulating evidence against Frank Lamotte might break the chain that bound him, and open his prison doors; but, one day, a week after her first visit to the prison, Mr. O'Meara dashed this hope to atoms.

"We can bring no criminal accusation against Lamotte," he said. "The examination proved that John Burrill was killed as early as eleven o'clock that night, and investigation has proven that Lamotte remained at home all that evening, and was heard moving about in his room until after midnight. I'm terribly sorry, Constance, but the case stands just about as it did at first, and the odds are still against Heath. He will have to stand his trial."

The girl's heart sank like lead, and as days passed on and no new developments could be evolved from a case which began to assume a most gloomy aspect, her position in the Lamotte household became unbearable.

Sybil had changed a very little, but for the better. Her fits of raving were less frequent, and almost always to be anticipated. So, worn in body and tortured in mind, Constance went back to Wardour, and, save, for her daily visits to the prison, was invisible to all her friends.

And she did not suffer alone. Knowing her love for Clifford Heath and the terrible secret she carried in her bosom, Mrs. Lamotte lived in an anguish of suspense. Would love outweigh honour? If the worst should come, could she trust Constance Wardour? Could she trust herself?

In those tortured hours, the same prayer went up from the heart of both mother and friend—that Sybil Lamotte would die!

While these things were making the world a weariness to Constance, Jerry Belknap, in his character of prospecting horse jockey, took up his quarters in a third-rate hotel near the river, and remained very quiet in fancied security, until he became suddenly enlightened as to the cause of his ill-success, as follows:

Lounging near the hotel one day, he was accosted by a stranger, who tapped him familiarly on the shoulder, saying:

"My friend, I've got a word to say to you. Will you just step into the nearest saloon with me. We will talk over a glass of something." Wondering inly at his coolness, Belknap followed the stranger, and they entered "Old Forty Rods," that being the nearest saloon.

Once seated face to face at a table, the stranger threw a letter across to Belknap, saying carelessly:

"Read that, if you please."

Opening the letter, these lines stared Belknap in the face:

You have broken your pledge, Jerry Belknap. I have had you under my eye constantly. Fortunately for yourself, I can make use of you. Follow the instructions of the bearer of this *to the letter* now and until further notice, if you hope for any mercy from BATHURST.

He stared at the open letter as if it possessed the eyes of a basilisk.

Instantly he recognised the power behind the scenes, and was no longer surprised at his failures. And he turned upon his companion a look of sullen submission.

"I know better than to kick against Bathurst," he said doggedly. "What does he want me to do?"

"That's just what we are going to talk about, said the stranger, coolly. "Draw your chair up closer, Jerry."

CHAPTER XL.

"TOO YOUNG TO DIE."

OVER days, filled with weary waiting and marked by few incidents and no discoveries we pass with one glance.

Clifford Heath's trial follows close upon his indictment. A month rolls away, and with the first days of winter comes the assembling of judge and jury, and his case is the first one called.

During the weeks that have intervened between his arrest and this day of his trial, Constance has been his bravest champion and truest friend; she has stimulated him to hope, and incited him to courage, with loving, cheerful words, while clinging desperately to a last remnant of her own sinking hope.

Day by day, during all this time, the ancient gig driven by Doctor Benoit, deposited that gentleman before the doors of Mapleton. Sybil's delirium had ended in a slow, wearisome fever, which left her, as the first frosts of winter touched the land, a white, emaciated shadow of her former self, her reason restored, but her memory sadly deficient. She had forgotten that dark phase of her life in which John Burrill had played so sinister a part, and fancied herself back in the old days when her heart was light and her life unfettered. She had dropped a year out of that life; but memory would come back with strength, the doctor said; and Mrs. Lamotte dreaded the days when that memory should bring to her daughter's brow a shadow never to be lifted—into her life a ghost never to be laid.

Evan, too, had narrowly escaped death at the hands of his rum demons; after four weeks filled with all the horrors attendant upon the drunkard's delirium, he came to his senses, hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed, emaciated, with his breath coming in quick, short, gasps, and the days of his life numbered.

Brandy had devoured his vitals; late hours and protracted orgies had sapped his strength; constant exposure in all weathers and at all hours had done its work upon his lungs.

"If he outlasts the winter, he will die in the spring."

This was the doctor's *ultimatum*.

News from the outside world was strictly shut out from those sick ones. The name of John Burrill never was breathed in their presence, and both were ignorant of the fact that Clifford Heath, an old-time favourite with each, was on trial for his life.

The morning that saw Clifford Heath quit his cell to take his place in the felon's dock and answer to the charge of murder, saw Sybil Lamotte lying upon a soft divan, before a merry winter fire. It was the first time since her illness that she had quitted her bed. And Evan, too, for the first time in many weeks, came with feeble, halting steps, to his sister's room, and sitting near her, scanned her wasted features with wistful intentness.

"Poor sis!" he murmured, stroking her hand softly, "We've had a pretty hard pull, you and I, but we're coming out famously." And then he added to himself, "More's the pity, so far as I am concerned."

"What made you ill Evan?" she whispered feebly. "Was it worrying about me?"

A bright flush leaped to his cheeks and burned there hotly.

"Yes, it was about you, sis. But you will soon be as well and happy as ever, won't you?" anxiously.

"To be sure, Evan; we will both get well very fast. We have got so much to live for, and we are too young to die."

CHAPTER XLI.

SIR CLIFFORD HEATHERCLIFFE.

It is the opening hour of Clifford Heath's trial.

The court room is crowded to its utmost capacity; never has there occurred a trial there so interesting to all W——.

The prisoner is a little paler, a little graver than his ordinary self. But is his ordinary self in every other respect; as proud of bearing, as self-possessed, as handsome, and *distingué* as ever.

Beside him sits Mr. O'Meara, alone. Mr. Wedron, after all his labour, and his seeming interest, is unaccountably absent; unaccountably, at least, so far as the opposition, the prisoner, the judge, jury, and all the spectators are concerned. Mr. O'Meara seems not at all disturbed by his absence, and evidently understands all about it.

Near the prisoner sits a man who causes a buzz of inquiry to run through the entire audience.

He is tall, fair-haired, handsome; the carriage of his head, the haughtiness of his bearing, reminds more than one present of Clifford Heath, as they first knew him. He is a stranger to all W——, and "Who is he? Who is he?" runs from lip to lip.

The stranger is seemingly oblivious of the attention lavished upon him; he bends forward at times, and whispers a word to the prisoner, or his counsel, and he turns occasionally to murmur something in the ear of Constance

Wardour, who sits beside him, grave, stately, calm.

She is accompanied by Mrs. Aliston and Mrs. O'Meara, and Ray Vandyck sits beside the latter lady, and completes the party.

Mr. Lamotte is there, subdued, yet affable, and Frank, too, who is paler than usual, but quite self-possessed.

Near the party above mentioned may be seen the two physicians, but, and here is another cause for wonderment, Doctor Benoit is not present; and, who ever knew the good doctor to miss an occasion like this?

"Business must be urgent, when it keeps Benoit away from such a trial," whispers one gossip to another, and the second endorses the opinion of the first.

Sitting there, scanning that audience with a seemingly careless glance, Constance feels her heart sink like lead in her bosom.

She feels, she knows, that already in the minds of most, her lover is a condemned man. She knows that the weight of evidence will be against him. They have a defence, it is true, but nothing will overthrow the fact that John Burrill went straight to the house of the prisoner, and was found dead hard by.

All along she has hoped, she knew not what, from Bathurst. But since he returned Sybil's note in so strange and abrupt a manner, she has had no word or sign from him, and now she doubts him, she distrusts everything.

But, little by little, day by day, she has been schooling her heart to face one last desperate alternative. Her lover *shall* be saved! Let the trial go on. Let the worst come. Let the fatal verdict be pronounced, if it must; after that, perish the Wardour honour. What if she must trample the heart out of a mother's breast? What if she must fling into the breach the life of a blighted, wronged, helpless, perhaps dying sister woman?

Hardening her heart, crushing down her pride, she muttered desperately on this last day of doubt and suspense:

"Let them all go. Let the verdict be what it may, Clifford Heath shall not suffer a felon's doom!"

Then she had nerved herself to calmness and gone to face the inevitable.

"Prisoner at the bar, are you guilty or not guilty?"

The reading of the indictment has turned all eyes upon the prisoner's face.

He stands erect, his head haughtily poised, his clear dark eyes fixed fully upon the judge.

"I am not guilty, your honour."

A murmur runs through the court room. The stranger bends to whisper to Constance. The trial proceeds.

Once again all the evidence brought forward at the inquest is repeated—sworn to, dilated upon. Once again it presses the scales down, down, down, and the chances for the prisoner hang light in the balance.

One thing puzzles the prosecuting attorney, and troubles the mind of Jasper Lamotte.

O'Meara, the shrewd, the fox-like—O'Meara, who never lets pass a flaw or a loophole for criticism; who never loses a chance to pick and torture and puzzle a witness, is strangely indifferent.

One by one the witnesses for the prosecution pass before him; little by little they build a mountain of evidence against his client. He declines to examine them. He listens to their testimony with the air of a bored playgoer at a very poor farce.

After the testimony of the two masons, comes that of the party who last saw John Burrill in life. They testify as they did at the inquest—neither more, nor less.

Then come the dwellers in Mill Avenue. They are all there but Brooks and Nance Burrill.

"Your honour," says the prosecuting attorney, "two of our witnesses—two very important ones—are absent. Why they are absent, we do not know. Where they may be found, is a profound mystery.

"One of these witnesses, a man called Brooks, we believe to have been especially intimate with the murdered man. We think that he could have revealed the secret which the prisoner took such deadly measures to cover up. This man cannot be found. He disappeared shortly after the murder.

"Our other witness vanished almost simultaneously. This other was the divorced wife of the murdered Burrill. She, too, knew too much. Now I do not insinuate, I do not cast any stones, but there are some, not far distant, who could explain these two mysterious disappearances, 'an they would.'"

"An they *will!*" pops in the hitherto mute O'Meara. "They'll make several knotty points clear to your understanding, honourable sir."

A retort rises to his opponent's lips, and a wordy war seems imminent, but the crier

commands "Order in the Court," and the two antagonists glare at each other mutely, while the trial moves on.

Frank Lamotte comes upon the witness stand. As before, he tells nothing new.

He was aware that his brother-in-law possessed some secret of Doctor Heath's. Did not know the nature of it, but inferred, from words Burrill had let drop, that it was of a damaging character.

Upon being questioned as to his acquaintance with the prisoner, and what he knew of his disposition and temper, he replies that he has known the prisoner since he first came to W——; liked him very much; never had any personal misunderstanding, although of late the prisoner had chosen to treat him with marked coldness.

As to his temper—well, he must admit that it was very fiery, very quickly roused, very difficult of control, he believed. Prisoner was by nature intolerant to a fault. He had shown this disposition in presence of witness on many occasions.

Being shown the knife found in the cellar, he examines it carefully, and pronounces it to be the one he has often seen in Doctor Heath's instrument case, or its precise counterpart.

This ends his testimony. O'Meara has no questions to ask, and Jasper Lamotte takes his son's place. He is the last witness for the prosecution.

He has less to say than any of the others.

He had heard of his son-in-law's encounter with Doctor Heath, of course; knew that a feud existed between them; could not so much as guess the nature of it. The prosecuting attorney is about to dismiss him *sans ceremonie*, when Mr. O'Meara springs into sudden activity and announces his desire to examine the witness.

His opponent stares astonished, a murmur runs through the room; the Court bids him proceed.

"Mr. Lamotte," begins O'Meara, rising to his feet with provoking slowness, and then propounding his questions with a rapidity which leaves the witness no time for thought. "Mr. Lamotte, what can you tell us of this missing witness, Brooks?"

Mr. Lamotte stares in mute astonishment, then instinctively scenting danger ahead, he makes an effort to rally his forces that have been scattered by the lawyer's unexpected bomb.

"What do I know of the man Brooks?" he repeats slowly. "I don't comprehend you, sir."

"I asked a plain question," retorts the lawyer, crisply.

"I believe the man has been in my employ," ventures the witness, as if making an effort to recall some very insignificant personage.

"When?"

"That I do not remember, sir."

"Ah! Perhaps you have forgotten when last you saw this fellow, Brooks?"

"I think I saw him for the last time, two days before my son-in-law was killed. I was at the depot, starting for the city. I think Brooks left town on the same train."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Make an effort to think, sir. Brooks has been seen in W—— since. It is known that he has visited Mapleton. Try to recall that visit."

Mr. Lamotte ponders and falls into the trap.

"A man came to Mapleton on the day of Mr. Burrill's funeral," he says, slowly. "I believe, upon reflection, that it *was* Brooks; he wished to see the body."

"Did you see this man on that occasion?"

"I did; for a moment only; he came to me with his request."

"You are sure this man was Brooks?"

"Not beyond a doubt. I was troubled, and busy. It was one of my factory hands; I *think* it was the man Brooks."

"Mr. Clerk," says O'Meara, turning suddenly to that functionary, "please take down Mr. Lamotte's statements. He is *not* sure that it was the man Brooks."

Mr. Lamotte looks disconcerted for a moment.

But O'Meara goes vigorously on, leaving him no time to collect his thoughts.

"Now, Mr. Lamotte, what do you know of this woman who calls herself Nance Burrill?"

"Nothing," with a glance of offended dignity.

"Nothing! I am told that she has worked in your mills."

"It is possible; I am not my own overseer, however, and do not know *all* my people."

"Have you ever heard that this woman could tell things that would not reflect credit upon your dead son-in-law?"

"No, sir," haughtily.

"Were you aware that this woman is not to be found, before learning the same in court?"

"No, sir! I consider your questions irrelevant."

"Possibly," retorts O'Meara, drily. "I have no more to ask, sir." Then turning toward the jury, he says rapidly:

"May it please your honour and the gentlemen of the jury, just here I have a word to say:

"You have heard the evidence against my client; you have heard the life and honour of a high-minded gentleman, against whom there was never before a breath of scandal or blame, sworn away by a handful of saloon loafers, and a pack of ignorant old women.

"I mean no disrespect to the loafers or the old women in question. I suppose if the good Lord had not intended them for what they are, he would have made them otherwise, and then there would have been no evidence against my client. I name them what they are, because, when this honourable jury weighs the evidence, I want them to weigh the witnesses as well."

"The gentleman wished to say one word," sneers the prosecution. "Has he said it, or is this the beginning of his plea?"

"It would be better for your case if it were the beginning of my plea," cuts in O'Meara; "my witnesses will be less to the gentleman's liking than are my words.

"Your honour, first then, the gentleman for the prosecution, in making his preliminary remarks, has dwelt at length upon the fact that my client is comparatively a stranger to W——; a stranger with a mystery. Now, then, I wish to show that it is possible for a stranger to W—— to be an honourable man, with an unblemished past; and that it is equally possible for a dweller in this classic and hitherto unpolluted town to be a liar and to perjure himself most foully.

"Let the Honourable George Heathercliffe take the stand.

"And mark you, this gentleman *is* the Honourable George Heathercliffe, of Cliffe Towers, Hampshire, England, member of parliament, and honoured of the Queen. His passports have been examined by our honourable judge, thereby saving the necessity for too much unpolished Yankee criticism."

"It has failed to save us a dose of Irish pig-headedness, however," interpolates the opposing barrister.

During the burst of smothered laughter that follows, the stately fair-haired stranger quits his place beside Constance, and takes the stand.

He is duly sworn, and then Mr. O'Meara begins, with much impressiveness:

"Mr. Heathercliffe, turn your eyes upon the prisoner, my client. Have you ever seen him before entering this court-room?"

The Honourable George Heathercliffe turns towards the prisoner, and a smile deepens the blue of his eyes, and intensifies the kindly expression of his handsome mouth.

"I have seen the prisoner before," he replies, still smiling.

"Have you known him previous to his advent in W——?"

"I have."

"For long?"

"For many years."

"My honourable opponent has hinted that there is a mystery hanging about this man. He even hazards a guess that his name may not be Clifford Heath. Do you know aught of this mystery?"

"I do."

"Does the prisoner bear a name not his own?"

"He does not bear his own name entire."

"Mr. Heathercliffe, who is this man who calls himself Doctor Clifford Heath?"

"He is *Sir Clifford Heathercliffe*, and my elder brother."

CHAPTER XLII.

A TORTURED WITNESS.

THERE is a profound sensation in the court-room.

Constance Wardour catches her breath, and bends forward to look at her lover, the colour coming and going hotly in her cheeks. She had chosen to hear nothing of his past, and so Mr. O'Meara has introduced the Honourable George Heathercliffe, that morning, saying only: "A most important witness, Constance; a *strong* witness."

"He is Sir Clifford Heathercliffe, and my elder brother."

Mr. Rand, the prosecuting attorney, moves uneasily in his seat, and begins to wonder what small shot O'Meara holds back of this big shell.

Without seeming to notice the sensation created by his self-possessed witness, O'Meara goes on rapidly.

"How long has your brother, Sir Clifford Heathercliffe, been in America?"

"For more than three years."

"Until you received the telegram calling you to his aid, did you know where to find your brother?"

"I did not."

"Mr. Heathercliffe, have you that telegram in your possession?"

"I have."

"Will you permit his honour, the judge, to see that telegram?"

"Assuredly." He draws forth a morocco letter-case, and taking therefrom a slip of paper hands it to O'Meara. That astute gentleman passes it carelessly on to the clerk, saying: "Read it, please."

Rising to receive the paper, the clerk reads:

Honourable George Heathercliffe,
Cliffe Towers, etc., etc.

Come at once to W——, R—— County.—Sir Clifford is in deep trouble.

BATHURST.

"Bathurst!" the name falls involuntarily from the lips of Mr. Rand; he knows the expert by reputation, and this is the first intimation he has received that so shrewd a man is at work in the interest of Clifford Heath.

"Is this the only message you received?"

"No, later in the day this came."

He produced and passed over a second dispatch, which is read like the first.

Honourable George Heathercliffe, etc.

Before starting find out everything you can concerning one John, or Jonathan, Burrill, once in the employ of your father.

BATHURST.

The two Lamottes glance uneasily at each other. Whither is this examination tending?

"Did you follow the instructions in this last telegram?" asks O'Meara.

"I did."

A bland smile widens the mouth of the little Irish lawyer. He waves his hand magisterially.

"That is all, for the present, Mr. Heathercliffe," he says, suavely, and amazement sits on every countenance.

And now Mr. Rand bends forward and flings himself into the arena, while O'Meara leans back in his chair, his eyes twinkling maliciously.

"Mr. Heathercliffe," begins the cross-examiner, "your two dispatches are signed 'Bathurst.' Who is this Bathurst?"

"Mr. Bathurst, sir, is a very able detective."

"Ah! He is known to you, I presume?"

"He is," bowing gravely.

"Now, Mr. Heathercliffe, it strikes me as singular that an English gentleman should be on such familiar terms with a Yankee detective; and still more strange that an English nobleman should be masquerading in America, as a country physician. I should like an explanation of these things."

"My brother came to America on account of family troubles, sir. Is it *necessary* that I make a fuller statement?"

He asks this hesitatingly, and Mr. Rand fancies that he sees a point to be gained. He does not see that O'Meara is struggling to conceal the smile of satisfaction that *will* creep into his face.

"*I* consider it necessary, sir. It is high time that we knew why we have been honoured by this *incognito*—nobleman."

The witness turns an unruffled countenance towards the judge.

"If the Court will permit me to tell my brother's story in my own way (it will take some time), I shall be glad to enlighten this legal gentleman."

The Court gives its gracious permission; Attorney Rand resumes his seat; O'Meara fairly grins his delight; Constance leans forward, breathlessly; the prisoner casts one look about him, and then rests his head upon his hand; there is breathless silence in the court, as the Honourable George Heathercliffe begins:

"I have said that the prisoner at the Bar is my elder brother; three years ago he was not *Sir* Clifford Heathercliffe, not my eldest brother.

"The name of Sir Herbert Heathercliffe is, no doubt, unknown to all here present—except Mr. Bathurst, if that gentleman is here; but England has rung with that name, and the Heathercliffe pride has been lowered to the dust, because of it.

"Sir Herbert was the pet and favourite of our father, and possessed over him a strong magnetic influence. He was less than two years older than Clifford, and the two closely resembled each other.

"From their academic days, Herbert was an idler, a spendthrift, a squire of dames, *par excellence*. Clifford was devoted to study, and not enamoured of society.

"It is not my purpose to follow step by step the downward career of my brother Herbert; only such of his misdeeds as affected Clifford need be brought forward here.

"I have said that Herbert was a spendthrift. He was perpetually borrowing of Clifford, and always in debt.

"When Clifford, who had a monomania for the medical profession, announced his intention to go to Germany and pursue his studies there, the first trouble came.

"Herbert, who, for his own selfish ends, wished to keep Clifford and his purse nearer Cliffe Towers, incited my father to oppose the scheme. This was easy. Lord Heathercliffe did not believe in the dignity of labour, and the two voted this new departure a family disgrace. They said so much, and in such offensive language, that Clifford, in open defiance of his father's commands, turned his back upon us all, and went to Heidelberg.

"But, Herbert's career had only began. In a little while, it was discovered that our father's name had been forged for a large amount, and suspicion pointed to my brother Clifford. He came in hot haste on receipt of a telegram, and he did not come alone. He brought with him Detective Bathurst, whom he was so fortunate as to find at Scotland Yard.

"I need not dwell on what followed; Bathurst is a keen detective; he vindicated my brother Clifford, and placed the guilt where it belonged. It was Herbert who had forged my father's name.

"There was a terrible scene at the Towers. Herbert swore eternal enmity toward Clifford, and Clifford predicted then and there the downfall of all our pride, through Herbert's follies. I remember his words distinctly:

"'Let me tell you how this will end, Lord Heathercliffe,' he said; 'I have not grown up beside Herbert, not to know him. Our name has heretofore been stainless; we shall keep it so no longer; it will be dragged in the mud, smirched, hissed, disgraced utterly. But I will never permit myself to go down with the fall of the Heathercliffes; I renounce all claims upon you; I renounce my succession; I renounce a name already contaminated; the world is my heritage; I shall leave England; I shall leave Europe; I will make me a new name, and build my own fortune. When Herbert has broken your heart, and ruined your fortunes, as he surely will, and when his debaucheries have brought him to an early grave, as they must, then let the title fall to George; he is younger; he cannot feel this shame so keenly; as for me, I will never wear the title; I will never be pointed out as the peer whose elder brother was a rake, a seducer, a forger, and Herbert is all these.'

"Clifford went back to Heidelberg; Herbert remained at the Towers, whining, pleading, shamefully fawning upon a doting and half imbecile old man.

"He feigned illness; he feigned penitence, and finally he held my father more than ever his adoring slave.

"I cannot prolong this recital. It is needless. Herbert ran his race of infamy. My father died broken hearted. Clifford searched all England to bring Herbert, then a fugitive, to his father's deathbed; but the officers of justice were before him. They ran him down in an obscure provincial village, and, to escape the consequences of his misdeeds, Herbert Heathercliffe crowned his life of mad folly by dying a suicide's death.

"And now I must turn a page in my own personal history;

"Prior to my father's death, I had formed an attachment for the only daughter of a proud and wealthy country gentleman, our neighbour. But I was a younger son, and by my father's will, made upon his deathbed, Clifford was his heir. Herbert had squandered half our father's fortune, but a handsome sum still remained.

"Realizing the hopelessness of my suit, I was preparing to quit England, taking with me my mother's legacy, which would amply suffice for a bachelor's wants, but was too meagre a sum to lay at the feet of a beauty and an heiress. To make my departure more bitter, I had learned that the woman of my choice returned my affections.

"Then Sir Clifford swooped down upon me. Before I could guess his intent, he had sought and gained the consent of my wife's father; had transferred to me all his fortune, reserving only his mother's legacy, which was the same as mine. He forced me to accept by the strength of his splendid will. He installed me as master of Cliffe Towers. He hastened the marriage preparations. He remained long enough to dance at our wedding, and then he left us—proud as a king, independent as a gipsy, blameless, fearless, high-souled.

"He came to America, and never permitted us to know his whereabouts. At regular intervals we received his letters, many whimsical descriptions of his new life and new pursuits; but we always addressed him in New York, and our letters, bearing the English seal, came to him under an American

disguise. We did not so much as know the name he had assumed.

"This, gentlemen, is the true reason why Sir Clifford Heathercliffe, the truest, the noblest of English gentlemen, came among you as one of yourselves.

"I have one more word to say. Sir Clifford never saw the man, John Burrill; but our brother Herbert knew him well. Burrill was his tool and accomplice in many shameful escapades. They came to grief together; quarrelled fearfully, and, when Herbert fled for his life, Burrill with his wife made his escape to America. All that I have said concerning this Burrill will be verified by Detective Bathurst."

Then turning toward Mr. Rand: "Is my explanation sufficient, sir?"

The lawyer only bows his head, and the handsome Englishman takes his seat while the house rings with applause. Evidently his tersely told story of brotherly sacrifice has touched the "humanness" of that strangely-mixed audience.

During the moment of clamour and confusion, Doctor Benoit enters the court room, and almost unobserved seats himself beside the New York medical experts.

A smile of gratification comes to O'Meara's face at sight of this late arrival, and when the court is restored to quiet, he says:

"Let Dr. Benoit be sworn."

The doctor testifies as follows:

Being called to examine the wounds upon the person of John Burrill, he found that they could not have been made with the knife found with the body. The identical knife being put into his hands, he explains how a cut made by such a keen, heavy weapon must appear, and describes the knife that must have been used upon the body.

"It was a smaller weapon," he says, "thinner bladed and much lighter. It must have been shorter by two or three inches."

Then he adds that the surgeon's knife has never been used upon a body; the blood has been smeared on by an inartistic hand.

"It would be impossible," he says, "to withdraw this knife from a bleeding wound with no other blood marks than those it bears."

Doctor Gaylor and Professor Harrington corroborate his every statement, and when their testimony is done there is another sensation in the court room.

As Doctor Benoit passes by O'Meara, in returning from the witness-stand, he tosses over a piece of paper, which the lawyer seizes, scans eagerly, and stows carefully away.

He consults some papers for a moment, and then says:

"I wish to recall Francis Lamotte."

Frank comes again upon the stand; his eyes seem fixed on vacancy; his face is white and rigid; his answers come in a dry monotone.

"Mr. Lamotte," begins O'Meara, briskly. "It is understood that you have been a student in Doctor Heath's office."

"That is true."

"During the time you studied there, had you free access to the office at all hours?"

"I had."

"I judge, then, that you must have possessed a pass key?"

"I did."

"Is that key still in your possession?"

"No."

"How did you dispose of that key?"

"I think it was lost; it has been out of my possession for some time."

"Where did you lose this key?"

"I do not remember; possibly at home, possibly at the office. It has been out of my possession for some time."

"Since losing your key, how did you gain access to the office in the doctor's absence?"

"I have visited the office very seldom of late, and not once, since losing the key, in the absence of Doctor Heath."

"Mr. Lamotte, was there any way to distinguish your lost key from that used by my client?"

"Yes; my key was newer than his, and brighter."

"It was my client's custom to keep an extra suit of clothes in his office closet, was it not?"

"Yes."

"And it would be very natural that, in exchanging one garment for another, a glove or handkerchief should be sometimes left in the discarded garment?"

"Quite natural."

"Now, let us suppose that, on the night of the murder, my client, returning from a visit to Mapleton, where he was called to attend upon the wife of the murdered man, halted at his office, hung up his outer coat, and sat for a little time, writing or reading, or perhaps meditating.

"Let us suppose that on preparing to face the wind, that was rising rapidly, and blowing chill, he substituted a heavy overcoat for the

one he had worn earlier in the evening; and that he discovered, when half way home, that he had left his much-needed handerchief with his discarded coat.

"Would it not be quite an easy matter for some one who had obtained possession of your key, *and was sufficiently familiar with the bearings of the office, to move about in the dark*, or by the dim fire-light, to enter that office, remove the surgeon's knife from its case, pilfer a handkerchief from the coat pocket, and escape unseen?"

"It would— should think."

"If this person, having the key, the knife, and the handkerchief, all in his possession, should go and fling them all into the old cellar on the Burns' place, you would call that singular?"

"Yes," from lips white and parched.

O'Meara turns suddenly and takes something from the table.

"Mr. Lamotte, take this key, examine it well. Do it at all resemble the one you—*lost?*"

Frank takes the key, mechanically, turns it about with nerveless fingers, scarcely glances at it.

"I think—it is—the same," he mutters, hoarsely.

"You think it is your lost key. Mr. Lamotte, do you know where this key was found?"

"No," stolidly.

"I will tell you. It was found in the old cellar, embedded in the mud, *close beside the dead body of John Burrill.*"

Frank Lamotte's hands go up to his head, his pale face becomes livid, his eyes seem starting from their sockets; he gasps, staggers, falls heavily in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XLIII.

JUSTICE, SACRIFICE, DEATH.

AND there is confusion in the court room.

Mr. Rand bounds angrily to his feet, then reseats himself suddenly, and without opening his lips.

As they bear Frank Lamotte from the room, O'Meara's voice rises and rings clear above the buzz and bustle:

"That witness must not be permitted to leave the court."

Then he stands gazing about him like a small, rampant lion, his eyes flashing, his nostrils quivering, his whole manner betokening that he is warming to his work.

Presently the room is quiet again, and O'Meara addresses the court:

"Your honour, and gentlemen; I have been successful beyond my expectations. You see what a guilty conscience can do. I wished to convince this court that my client has enemies in W——; powerful, unsuspected, enemies. I wished also to demonstrate to Mr. Rand, how easy it is to obtain circumstantial evidence. The witness may recover at his leisure. I have nothing more to say to him."

While he is speaking, Mr. Lamotte and Doctor Benoit, who had hastened out to attend upon Frank, re-enter, and resume their places, the former looking harassed and uneasy, the latter bland as ever, and nodding an assurance that the patient is recovering safely.

"My next witness," says O'Meara, "is private detective Jerry Belknap; but, before this gentleman is sworn, I desire the clerk to read aloud, *very* loud, the testimony lately given by Mr. Jasper Lamotte. I want Mr. Lamotte's testimony to be fresh in the minds of the jury when they listen to Mr. Belknap."

Strive as he will, Jasper Lamotte cannot wear a look of entire unconcern, although his self-control is marvellous.

What does Jerry Belknap know concerning this case? Why is *he* here as a witness? Mr. Lamotte is speedily enlightened.

While the clerk reads his recent testimony, Jerry Belknap takes his place upon the stand. Not the Belknap Jasper Lamotte has known; not the Belknap of Constance Wardour's recollection; but Jerry Belknap, in *propria persona*, shorn of all disguise.

He is a man well up in his thirties, medium in height, slender in person, with a dark, smooth-shaven face, keen, restless eyes, black, closely cropped hair.

The clerk having finished the reading, Mr. O'Meara addresses the witness with marked courtesy.

"Mr. Belknap, you have heard the reading of Mr. Lamotte's testimony. You have heard Mr. Rand say that two important witnesses are absent, namely, a certain Brooks, and Mrs. Nance Burrill. You have heard Mr. Lamotte say that he knows nothing of the whereabouts of Nance Burrill, and that he knows nothing of Brooks.

"Now, as Mr. Lamotte cannot enlighten us, and as the attorney for the prosecution is very anxious about these two witnesses, will

you just tell the court what you know of Mr. Brooks, and Nance Burrill, as connected with this case?"

Jerry Belknap bows to O'Meara, bows to the court, wipes his mouth with a white silk handkerchief, and begins:

"I came to W—— on professional business, and, having obtained permission through Mr. O'Meara, I may state here what that business was.

"I came on behalf of Miss Wardour, to investigate the noted diamond robbery. I have been in and about W—— for some time, but always in disguise, this being the first time my real face has been visible.

"Not long ago a stranger accosted me and put into my hands a letter. The letter bade me follow the instructions of the bearer of the same without fear or question. Now Mr. Bathurst commands me at all times, and like a good soldier I obeyed my superior officer. I placed myself under the orders of Mr. Bathurst's deputy, who is himself a clever detective, and this is what he told me:

"Mr. Bathurst had been operating in W—— for weeks, under my very nose, and although I knew him, and am called a tolerable detective, I never found him out. He knew me, however, from the first, knew me all along, although I, several times, changed my disguise. *His* disguise was too perfect, and he is too good an actor, ever to betray himself.

"That disguise having served his purpose, and having been thrown aside for good, I can safely comply with Mr. O'Meara's request and oblige the gentleman for the prosecution.

"The missing witness known as Brooks, the red-headed drunken mechanic, was officer Bathurst and none other."

Again there is a buzz in the court room.

The prisoner turns upon his counsel a look of profound wonder.

Constance clasps her hands delightedly and begins to brighten with hope.

Jasper Lamotte wears a look of consternation.

"Mr. Bathurst's instructions were brief," resumes Mr. Belknap, after a moment's pause. "I was to present myself to Mr. Lamotte under some pretext of business. I am slightly known to Mr. Lamotte through my connection with the Wardour case, and could approach him without creating suspicion. I was to accept any commissions he might wish me to execute.

"I presented myself to Jasper Lamotte; he had a piece of work for me. He told me that he had good reasons for wishing Nance Burrill out of the town; he wished her no harm, but she was in his way. If I would get her away, on some pretext, he would pay me well. Acting under instructions, I approached the woman, making her acquaintance easily through her little boy. She is very ignorant and very foolish. I displayed a little money, offered her a profitable situation in New York, paid her a month's wages in advance, and took her and her child to the city, where I hired a small furnished cottage, and installed her as housekeeper. Not being informed that her evidence was wanted on this occasion she is there still."

When Jerry Belknap began his story, Jasper Lamotte had drawn nearer to the prosecuting attorney, and, before the story was done, a slip of paper had made its way into the hands of the latter gentleman, bearing these words:

"For God's sake don't cross-examine that witness."

Consequently, in response to O'Meara's unnecessarily polite query, "Will the attorney for the prosecution be pleased to cross-examine this witness?"—Mr. Rand only scowled at his antagonist, and shook his head savagely.

"This, I trust," begins O'Meara, before the last witness is fairly seated, "sufficiently explains the absence of these two *important* witnesses. It would seem that the absence of one at least was more important than her presence. Mr. Lamotte, at least, should be grateful. He desired Nance Burrill's absence; she is not here; and as no summons was issued for this woman, either by the prosecution or the defence, no one can accuse me of hampering the progress of the law, and of this honourable court."

Mr. Rand bounds up, fire in his eye.

"It may not be rulable nor dignified," he begins hotly, "but I demand a moment's hearing. This whole trial has been irregular, from first to last.

"The gentleman brings forward an honourable witness from over the water; a witness who brings out the accused in a new character; covers him with a blaze of glory. This is very good, and very theatrical. Let us grant that the accused *is* Sir Clifford Heathercliffe. Does that alter the fact that John Burrill went straight to his door, straight to the door of his sworn enemy, and was never again seen alive?

He seeks to implicate Frank Lamotte, and to impeach the integrity of Jasper Lamotte, an honourable gentleman, against whom there was never yet a breath of suspicion. It will not alter the facts in the case. Clifford Heath's enemy was found dead close by Clifford Heath's door! He has blackened the character of the dead; he has struck hard at the honourable living. He has flooded the court with the testimony of mysterious strangers; he has suppressed known witnesses; he has worked his will with us. But he has not disproved one item of evidence; he has not changed one fact or phase of the case. Let us grant all he has proven, what have we left? *The unalterable facts*, that the prisoner has repeatedly threatened his victim; that the murdered man set out to visit the prisoner, at night through the darkness, and was found early the following morning, before the body could be removed to a safer hiding place, his face covered by the prisoner's own linen; his gaping wounds giving evidence of a practised hand; the prisoner's knife buried with him; the *key* of the prisoner's office or house lying beside the shallow grave. Facts tell, gentlemen; these *are facts*."

These words rush from his lips torrent-like.

He has turned to face the jury, and so does not see that O'Meara has lounged back to his seat, with an air of perfect unconcern, and that he is actually signaling the judge not to stay this whirlwind; a proceeding which so astounds that official, that for full five minutes the tide of speech flows on, lava-like.

On the audience, it has a startling effect. He is speaking the truth. He is reiterating facts, and facts are sure of instant recognition by our Yankee countrymen.

A thrill runs through the assembly; there comes one of those sudden revulsions of feeling, common to scenes like this. Sir Clifford Heathercliffe disappears from before their dazzled vision; what they see, in the light of stern facts, is Clifford Heath, the murderer.

"These are facts," reiterates Mr. Rand, excitedly. "Who has seen this wonderful Bathurst, with his bundle of testimony? Who knows the man? Why is he not here in court? *Where is he?*"

"*Here!*"

Clear and full the voice rings over the room, transfixing for one moment the entire court; then the gavel descends; order is commanded with double unction, because of the recent lapse. Mr. O'Meara is on his feet; Mr. Rand's impromptu speech is at an end.

"More theatricals," snarls Mr. Rand, flinging himself violently down into his seat.

But no one heeds him; all eyes are fixed upon the new comers.

Near the door of the court room they stand grouped close together.

Mr. Wedron, dignified and placid as usual.

Mrs. Lamotte, with head proudly poised, and eyes that seem wells of pent-up anguish.

Evan Lamotte, looking like a lost and almost disembodied spirit.

Frank Lamotte, who during the time Mr. Belknap has occupied in giving his testimony, has quietly re-entered the room, seeming to have recovered, and looking almost composed, looks with the rest, and is once more, for a moment, startled out of all semblance of calmness; he starts up from his seat, then sinks back weakly, a desperate hunted look in his eyes, his hands clenched and working nervously.

They come slowly forward—Evan Lamotte, supported on either side by his mother and the *soi-disant* Mr. Wedron, of the New York Bar.

They pass so close that the lady's trailing silks brush against the feet of Jasper Lamotte, but she never vouchsafes a glance to husband or son, and Evan's eyes are set straight before him, fixed on vacancy—unseeing orbs of fire, set in a spectral face.

Presently, they are seated near the group gathered about the prisoner, and then Mr. Wedron confers with Mr. O'Meara.

As they talk, the little lawyer's face becomes grave, even to sadness, and when he rises to address the court, his tone is subdued, his manner that of one performing a painful task.

"May it please the court," he says, slowly, "the witnesses for whom I waited have come. As one of them is just recovering from a serious illness, Mr. Bathurst has thought it best that a reliable physician should certify to his perfect ability to testify at this time. Let Doctor Benoit be sworn."

It is done, and in the same grave and subdued manner Doctor Benoit bears witness, as follows:

"I have been in attendance at Mapleton for some weeks past. Evan Lamotte has been one of my patients. He has been very ill, and delirious almost constantly. It is less than a week since he entirely recovered his reasoning faculties. To-day, at the request of Mr. Wedron, I subjected him to various tests, and

I freely pronounce him perfectly sane—as sane as any here in this court room. If anyone is inclined to question my statement, I shall desire Professor Harrington and Doctor Gaylor to examine the witness."

There is profound silence for a moment, then O'Meara says, quietly:

"Will Detective Bathurst take the stand?"

The gentleman who has become known to many in W—— as Mr. Wedron, of the New York Bar, left his place near Evan Lamotte, and came quietly forward. Having been duly sworn, Mr. O'Meara said:

"Mr. Bathurst, you have been connected with this case from the first. Tell us what you have discovered, in your own way."

The detective bowed, took off a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and turned upon the court a pair of bright, piercing, handsome dark blue eyes, that proved themselves capable of numberless expressions.

"My name is Neil J. Bathurst," he began, "and I am a detective. I came to W—— for the first time early in the summer—in June, I believe. I came on professional business. To my surprise, and quite by accident, I found Sir Clifford Heathercliffe here in the character of Doctor Heath. My business in W—— was in no way connected with Sir Clifford, but before I left the town, which was on the third day after my arrival, I became aware that he had an enemy here. I left W—— to return in a short time, and I figured among the factory people as Brooks, the drunken mechanic. Mr. Lamotte employed me twice, and twice discharged me because of my intemperance. I became quite intimate and friendly with John Burrill, and succeeded in gaining his confidence. I was also on good terms with Nance Burrill, John Burrill's divorced wife, and I learned a good many things from her.

"Early in the autumn it came to my knowledge that Sir Clifford's enemies had begun to move, that a plan was on foot against him. About this time I discovered that several people needed looking after, and I sent for a boy shadower. He came, and did his work well. He is not here, because his testimony is not needed.

"You will understand that I had now more than one operation on my hands. I was still engaged upon the case which first brought me to W——, and I was intent upon frustrating the designs of Sir Clifford's enemies. He, Sir Clifford, was not aware of my presence in W——, and he was likewise ignorant of the plot against him.

"Early in November, I found it expedient to appear in W—— in a new character. Brooks had done his work. Accordingly, I, as Brooks, set out for the city one morning, leaving my shadower in charge of the field. Jasper Lamotte went to the city by the same train, and, singular coincidence, he came back on the train which brought me. I returned, as Mr. Wedron, an attorney, and I brought with me an assistant (for the plot was thickening fast), who assumed the character of a book peddler. I was absent only two days, but, during that time, the entire drama had undergone a transformation.

"Before I had been half an hour in W——, I had received the report of my shadower; it was startling. John Burrill had been murdered. Here was a disappointment. I had fully intended that Burrill should do some honest work in the State penitentiary, and was almost prepared to make some arrests. I attended the inquest, and was again discomfited. The enemies of Sir Clifford had abandoned their first infamous scheme for his ruin, and had succeeded in fastening this miserable crime upon him. Standing there in the presence of all the actors in the tragedy, and listening to the witnesses before the coroner, I decided what course to pursue. I would make my other operations a secondary affair, and devote myself to the task of finding John Burrill's murderer. I presented myself to Mr. O'Meara, and made known my identity; we decided to act together, and at once set to work.

"I knew that Francis Lamotte was Sir Clifford's secret enemy, and, naturally, I began to study him, and to watch him. You have heard his testimony to-day, and you know how easy it would have been for him, first to follow and to kill John Burrill, and next to cast suspicion upon an innocent man. I could prefer a charge against him, and bring some circumstantial evidence to back it; but this would not vindicate Sir Clifford, and would complicate affairs very much. What I wanted, was *proof* positive, absolute. So I waited, and studied the case. Of one thing I was assured; Francis Lamotte, whether guilty or innocent, knew more of that murder than he chose to tell.

"One day, while in conversation with Miss Wardour, I chanced to mention the name of Evan Lamotte, adding something not com-

plimentary to that young gentleman. Miss Wardour took fire at once. She assured me that Evan Lamotte was *not* what people sought to make him; that in spite of his weaknesses, he had many noble and lovable qualities. She told me how he came to her when the first shock of his sister's flight was upon him; she described, vividly, his passion, his sorrow, his love for his sister. He spoke of her as the only being on earth whom he truly loved, the only one who had been unvaryingly kind to him. He cursed the destroyers of his sister's happiness, and implored Miss Wardour not to abandon that unfortunate sister. He said that he believed she would return, and he implored her to visit his parents, and intercede in behalf of the fugitive.

"Miss Wardour gave him the required promise, and then said that if the real reason for this strange elopement *must* remain a secret, she wished they could hit upon some explanation that would spare the fugitive as much as possible, and satisfy the gossips. Instantly he sprang up, declaring that he would furnish a reason, a reason that no one would question, and that would spare his sister.

"A few days later, the story was flying about W——, that to save her brother Evan from the consequences of some evil deed, Sybil Lamotte had sacrificed herself.

"When Miss Wardour heard of this, she knew that Evan Lamotte had allowed himself to be defamed for his sister's sake. She knew that the true reason for her friend's *mesalliance* was hidden safely beneath a brother's sacrifice.

"Miss Wardour told me this, and much more, in praise of Evan Lamotte; and here, for his sake, let me say, that in studying John Burrill and Francis Lamotte, I had discovered that Sybil Lamotte had been made to believe that the honour and safety of her father and *elder* brother, depended upon her sacrifice, when the truth is, that she was *sold*. Simply sold—for their convenience, and their gain.

"You have looked upon Jasper Lamotte as an honourable citizen. On the day of John Burrill's funeral, I resumed my old disguise, that of Brooks, and went to Mapleton; I told Mr. Lamotte that I had come as a friend of his, and of Burrill's, to warn him, that if Nance Burrill was allowed to remain in W——, she would be brought forward at this trial, and give damaging evidence against his dead son-in-law.

"I remained in the library with him some fifteen minutes. My errand was a trap, and he fell into it. What followed, Mr. Belknap has already told. In the presence of this court, Jasper Lamotte has perjured himself. Let the officers of the law keep this fact in mind.

"Now, to return to my witness. When I heard Miss Wardour's glowing vindication of Evan Lamotte, I said to myself, 'Here is the right person. Evan Lamotte is the one who can clear up this mystery.' It was clear as day to my eyes.

"It was necessary that I should see him, but I very soon learned that he was lying at his home dangerously ill, and quite out of his senses. There was nothing to do but to wait. I made the acquaintance of Doctor Benoit, and from him I obtained daily news of his patient.

"At the eleventh hour, when I had begun to despair of his recovery, the doctor reported the patient restored to his senses. I then told him, Doctor Benoit, that the very moment Evan Lamotte was able to listen, and to talk rationally, I must see him. That the case was one of life and death.

"This day, at the very hour when the trial was called, I set out for Mapleton; I saw Evan Lamotte; I told him that Clifford Heath was on trial for the murder of John Burrill, and that the chances were against him.

"It is not necessary to repeat all that passed between us; the result is, that Evan Lamotte comes into this court of his own free will and accord, and it is his desire that he be allowed to tell his own story.

"He comes here freely, willingly, asking nothing, hoping nothing, and when this audience has heard his testimony, they will join me in pronouncing him the noblest Lamotte of them all."

There is a look so weird, so unearthly, in the eyes of Evan Lamotte, as he comes forward and turns his face slowly upon the audience, so that all can see its ghastly contrast with those burning orbs, that a startled hush falls upon them all, a funereal silence pervades the room.

They seem to note for the first time, what a solemn thing is the oath, which Evan takes with voice hollow and weak, but calm and full of decision. His breath comes in short gasps, his sentences are broken, the fatigue caused by his effort to speak is evident. But he goes on to the end, and this is what he says:

"When I learned that my sister's life had

been ruined, I was a madman; I did not know for a time why she had thus thrown herself away, but I determined that I would know, and I set myself to spy upon my own family.

"If the detective had not told you this truth I should withhold it now, for we all have a sufficient burden of shame upon us.

"I watched and I listened, and I learned why Sybil had been sacrificed.

"At first I thought I would openly assault Burrill, would compel him to resist, and would make his life as uncomfortable as possible; I was a madman.

"Constance Wardour told me it was not the way to help Sybil; that such a course would only cause her added sorrow. When I grew calmer I saw that Conny was right. I promised her to do nothing that would add to my poor sister's unhappiness.

"By and by they came home, and I saw the misery in my sister's face; day by day it deepened, her eyes growing hollow and wild, and full of unutterable horror and fear, her face growing paler and thinner, and sadder, her hands so weak and tremulous, all appealed to me, all maddened me afresh. I resolved that in some way I would free her. But how?

"Day after day I brooded upon it. Burrill became more bestial, more besotted, more contemptible, every day. My sister's strength was almost gone, her reason was tottering.

"I began to cultivate Burrill. I flattered him; I caroused with him. I had sunk so low myself that he could feel at ease with me. But drunk or sober, I never once forgot a resolve I had taken. Matters were going from bad to worse. It must be Sybil's life or *his*. I resolved that it should *not* be my sister who was sacrificed.

"When I found that no more time could be wasted, I laid my plans. I feigned illness and kept my room for several days.

"Burrill came daily to see me. I told him that I had some rare new fun in my head, and we planned that I should feign to be worse than usual. Burrill knew that our people had made efforts to stop our nocturnal expeditions, and he agreed with me that the thing should be kept secret. On that last night he left the house early, saying that he would spend a couple of hours at 'Old Forty's' and then meet me at a place appointed.

"At nine o'clock I stole out, and no one at Mapleton discovered my absence. I did not intend that they should. I waited at the place appointed for our meeting until I grew impatient. The time came for him to appear; he did not come. I knew where I should find him, and set out for 'Forty Rods.' I was determined to let that night end Sybil's troubles.

"Half way between the saloon and Doctor Heath's I saw him.

"He passed close to me, as I came up from Mill Avenue, and reeled across the road. He was not going toward our rendezvous, but away from it.

"I followed stealthily. I did not make my nearness known. I think he was too drunk to know where he was going or where to stop.

"He reeled past Doctor Heath's house, and was nearly opposite the gate of the empty lot before he discovered that he had gone too far.

"He turned, and while he leaned against the fence and seemed to ponder, I crept upon him, knife in hand; I struck him, once, again, a third time. He uttered one groan loud enough to have been heard some distance away, and then fell heavily. When I was sure that he was dead—I seemed to know just how to act—I ran to the gate of the Burns' lot and opened it wide. The body was twice my weight, but I dragged it inside before my strength gave out.

"Then, for a while, I seemed panic stricken. What should I do with that body? By and by, I thought of a way to get help. I waited until midnight, then I made my way to Mapleton, all bloodstained, and carrying the knife with me. Unseen I entered and gained Frank's room. He was up and pacing the floor; I told him to follow me. He saw my blood-stained hands and garments; I opened my coat and displayed the knife, and he obeyed me. I told him what I had done, and that he must help me conceal the body. For a moment he seemed stunned, and then he assisted me with surprising readiness; he planned everything; in fact, took the lead from that moment. I thought he was working to save his brother. The detective has told me the truth, and abjured me to tell all I know.

"Frank left me at the foot of the stairs leading to Heath's office. When he came down he seemed much excited, and hurried on very fast. We scooped out a grave in the cellar, as best we could in the dark, Frank working actively. He told me to take my knife and throw it into the old well—if you

look you will find it there. While I was doing it he must have put the other knife in the grave. When I came back he had covered the face with something white. I did not think about it at the time; now I know that it was Doctor Heath's handkerchief.

"Doctor Heath is an innocent man. *I* killed John Burrill; I am here to accept the consequences. I did the deed to save my sister. I do not regret it."

Then, turning toward the place where Frank Lamotte sits, cowering and panic stricken, he stretches out one spectral hand and says:

"Frank! Frank Lamotte, do the only thing left you to do; stand up and say that I have spoken the truth. Let us end this at once, Frank!"

Like one roused from some strange stupor, Frank staggers to his feet.

"It is all true!" he gasps. "Evan has told nothing but the truth." Then he falls back in his seat more dead than alive.

To describe the triumph of O'Meara; the mingled pity and gladness that fills the heart of Constance; the rejoicings of Clifford Heath's friends, one and all; the misery and the shame that overwhelmed the Lamottes, would be useless. The excitement of the audience, judge, and jury, can be imagined better than described.

The tragic farce is at an end. The case is given to the jury. Without quitting their places, they return their verdict. Clifford Heath is not guilty; is honourably acquitted.

Exhausted by his recent effort, Evan Lamotte is carried from the court-room, closely attended by his mother; is carried to the cell where lately Clifford Heath has dwelt a prisoner, while the latter is escorted in triumph, to O'Meara's, by all his rejoicing friends.

As the procession of conquerors moves away from the entrance, an officer approaches Jasper Lamotte.

"Mr. Lamotte, I am very sorry, sir, but you must consider yourself my prisoner."

Jasper Lamotte bows coldly, and signals the man that he will follow him.

The officer turns to Frank, but before he can open his lips the miserable young man steps back, makes one quick movement; there is a flash, a loud report, and Frank Lamotte falls forward, to be caught in the arms of a bystander.

They lay him gently down, and Jasper Lamotte bids them send for a physician; there must be one very near.

But Frank beckons his father to come close, and when the others have drawn back, this is what the father hears from the son's lips:

"There is another—pistol in—my pocket—I meant it for Evan,—you—had better—use it."

Horrible words from the lips of a dying son. They are his last. Before Doctor Benoit can turn back and reach his side, Frank Lamotte has finished his career of folly, and sin, and shame, dying as he had lived, selfishly, like a coward.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SPARTAN MOTHER.

"I NEVER before in all my career, brought to justice a criminal whom I both pitied unreservedly, and justified fully. Viewing all things from his standpoint, Evan Lamotte is less a murderer than a martyr."

It is the day after the trial with so strange an ending. They are seated in O'Meara's library; Constance, Mrs. Aliston, Mrs. O'Meara, Sir Clifford, his brother, the Honourable George Heathercliffe, Ray Vandyck, O'Meara, and Mr. Bathurst. Mr. Bathurst, who now appears what he *is*: a handsome gentleman, about thirty years of age, clever, vivacious, eminently agreeable. Mr. Wedron, like Brooks, has served out his day, and been set aside.

They have assembled at the detective's request, and while fully expecting a revelation of some sort, they look a serene, and not an apprehensive party.

"Poor Evan," sighs Constance; "I pity him most sincerely; I shall go and see him."

"*We* will go and see him," corrects Sir Clifford, and she smiles, and does not dispute the correction.

"Before I begin my other story," says the detective, "I may as well tell you of my visit yesterday, and how my news was received.

"From the moment when I heard Miss Wardour's description of Evan Lamotte, I knew he was our man. But I was determined to have no more mistakes. So I kept my opinion to myself. You can imagine how anxiously I hung upon the words of Doctor Benoit, knowing that upon this boy's chances for life hung Sir Clifford's life, liberty, and honour.

"When I saw that poor, pale, wreck of humanity, my heart almost failed me. How could I drag his secret from him? But no time was to be lost, and, as best I could, I told him everything. First, that his sister believed herself the guilty one; guilty, at least,

in that she had instigated the deed, and next, that Sir Clifford was now the victim of this crime. His mind at once seemed to grasp the issue. He had listened to me intently, breathlessly almost; he now lifted himself suddenly from the bed, and said quickly:

"'Why, then, it seems I have not saved Sybil yet. Call my mother! let me see her alone.'

"I obeyed him without a question; they were alone together for a long half-hour, then Mrs. Lamotte came to me with the same look upon her face that you saw in court.

"'Evan tells me that you know everything,' she said, her voice trembling in spite of herself. 'He tells me that you are a detective. Then you know that I have *one* son of whom I may be proud. Evan Lamotte has saved his sister's honour. Saved it doubly. My weak, my ill-used Evan, has proven the only man with a man's pride, who bears the name of Lamotte. Because he could not see his sister and his mother contaminated by the presence of the monster his father and brother had been so base as to force upon us, he has taken justice into his own hands. He has freed his sister; he has saved her from crime, and now he stands ready to put himself in the place of a wronged and innocent man. I shall go with him into court; I shall not leave him again.'

"She broke off with a dry sob and turned away to prepare for the drive.

"How I pitied that proud woman. How tender she was of her lost boy, and how he clung to her.

"Mr. O'Meara," turning suddenly towards the lawyer, "we must get that poor fellow out of that cell. Doctor Benoit says that he can live but a short time at best. He must not die there, and justice cannot deal with a dying man."

"I think it can be managed," replied the lawyer. "All W—— will favour the scheme. Not a man or woman will raise their voice against that dying boy. He will have plenty of friends *now*.

"He shall find them strong friends, too," exclaimed Constance. "Mrs. O'Meara, we will stir up the whole town."

"Then you'll get your way," put in Bathurst. "And now, Miss Wardour, are you ready to hear the end of the mystery surrounding the Wardour robbery, and the Wardour diamonds?"

All eyes were turned at once upon the speaker.

"Because I have asked you all to meet me here to-day that I might tell it," he went on. "It will contain much that is new to you all, and it will interest you all. I know Miss Wardour will wish you all to hear the end of her diamond case, and the fate of her robbers."

"Of course! You are perfectly right, Mr. Bathurst," said Constance. "Doctor Heath cuts more of a figure than he knows in this business, and Ray has staid out in the cold long enough. Go on, Mr. Bathurst, expose me in all my iniquity. But have you *really* found the robbers?"

"Listen," said the detective, and while they all fixed upon him their gravest attention, he began.

CHAPTER XLV.

TOLD BY A DETECTIVE.

"For several years past," began Mr. Bathurst, "the city and many of the wealthier suburban towns have been undergoing a systematic overhauling. Through the network of big thefts and little thefts, petit larcenies and bank robberies, there has run one clear-cut burglarious speciality—a style of depredations noticeably similar in case after case; alike in 'design and execution,' and always baffling to the officers.

"I allude to a series of robberies of jewellery and plate, a succession of provoking thefts, monstrous enough to be easily traced, but executed with such exceeding *finesse* that, in no single instance, has the property been recovered, or the robbers run to earth.

"These fastidious thieves never took money in large amounts, only took plate when it was of the purest metal and least cumbersome sort; and always aimed for the brightest, the purest, the costliest diamonds. Diamonds indeed seemed their specialty.

"This gang has operated in such a gingerly, gentlemanly, mysterious manner, and has raided for diamonds so long and so successfully, that they have come to be called, among New York detectives, The Diamond Coterie, although no man knew whether they numbered two, or twenty.

"They could always recognise their handiwork, however, and whenever the news came that some lady in the city, or suburbs, had lost her diamonds, and that the thieves had made a 'clean job' of it, the officers said, 'That's the work of the Diamond Coterie.'

"I have been much abroad of late, but every time I came back to New York the Coterie had gathered fresh jewels into its treasure box, and no man had found a clue to the sly fellows.

"I began to feel interested in the clique and resolved to take a hand at them, at the first opportunity. That opportunity came, with the news of the great Wardour robbery, and I came down to W——.

"I saw enough in this robbery to interest me, for various reasons.

"I believed I could see distinctly the handiwork of the Diamond Coterie, and I saw another thing: it was the first piece of work I had known them to bungle. And they had bungled in this.

"I made some of my conclusions known to Miss Wardour and her friends, but I kept to myself the most important ones.

"The story of the chloroform, so carefully administered, was one of the things over which I pondered much; I borrowed the chloroform bottle and the piece of linen that had been used to apply the drug, and that night I accepted the hospitality proffered me by Sir Clifford. I took a wax impression of the vial, at his house, and I made an important discovery while there.

"Sir Clifford found me half famished and ordered his housekeeper to bring in lunch. Not wishing my identity known, I pretended to be a patient; and just as my host was leaving the room, he tossed me a handkerchief, which he took from a side table, bidding me make myself a bandage to partially conceal my face.

"Now my eyes are trained to see much at a glance, and the moment they fell upon that bit of white linen they were riveted there.

"The handkerchief was precisely like the mutilated one used with the chloroform. This might be a coincidence—plain white handkerchiefs with wide borders were not uncommon, but this handkerchief was *marked!*

I could scarcely wait until Sir Clifford should show me to my room, so anxious was I to compare the two pieces of linen.

"The whole one bore the initials F. L., and on the raw, torn edge of the half square was a black dot that was undoubtedly the fragment of a letter, or name, that had been torn hastily off. It corresponded exactly with the lower end of the letter L. upon the whole handkerchief given me by Sir Clifford.

"This might be a coincidence, but it is one of my rules to suspect two coincidences coming close together; and I had already discovered three remarkable ones in this case.

"Sitting alone in my room, I reflected thus:

"Take it for granted this robbery was perpetrated by the Diamond Coterie, what are the facts?"

"The robbers knew where to enter, and where to look for plunder; *ergo*, they must have known the premises.

"They administered the deadly chloroform with nicest calculation; *ergo*, they must have known Miss Wardour.

"One of them was something of a dandy,—witness the superfine bit of cambric, and the print of jaunty boots where he leaped the garden fence.

"The next morning I took unceremonious leave of my host, and set out on my explorations. As I approached Wardour Place I met a man, who immediately drew my interest to himself.

"This man was Jerry Belknap. He wore a disguise quite familiar to me, and I recognised him easily. He entered at the Wardour gate, and I sauntered on, having found new food for thought.

"Now, a word concerning this man Belknap.

"At one time he was an honourable member of the best detective force in the city; but he had too much cupidity, and not enough moral firmness. Twice he allowed himself to be bribed into letting a case fall through, and finally I caught him in secret conclave with a gang of bank burglars, who were conspiring to raise a fortune for each, and escape with their booty through the connivance of our false detective.

"I exploded this little scheme, and compelled Belknap to withdraw from the force. Imagine my surprise when, a little later, Miss Wardour told me that *Mr. Belknap* was the detective sent down from the city by Mr. Lamotte!

"Well, Mr. Belknap went to work upon the case, and Miss Wardour concealed me near her dining-room so that I might have the pleasure of listening to his first report.

"That was a fortunate ambush for me. Mr. Belknap's deductions were as diametrically opposite to mine as if he had purposely studied out the contrast; and I was shaking my sides with the thought of how all this plausibility must be puzzling Miss Wardour and her aunt, when a new element was introduced into the programme.

"Mr. Frank Lamotte, fresh from an amateur robber hunt, came into the room. It had been arranged that Mrs. Aliston should break to this young man the news that his sister had that day eloped with John Burrill; but first he was to relate his adventures, and this he did.

"If I can hear a voice, before seeing the face, I can usually measure its truth or falsity. Now, I had not seen Mr. Frank Lamotte, but his voice told me that he was rehearsing a well studied part; and, furthermore, I was assured that Belknap knew this, and purposely helped him on.

"By and by Miss Wardour withdrew, and Mrs. Aliston fulfilled her mission. Then I was more than ever convinced of the fellow's insincerity. I heard how he received the news of his sister's flight; and when Mrs. Aliston went, in a panic, to call her niece, I heard him, when he fancied himself alone.

"It seems he had been the bearer of a note from his sister to Miss Wardour, and he was now intent upon learning if that note had contained anything damaging to himself. This much I learned from his solitary mutterings, and then Miss Wardour re-entered the room. He was half wild, until she had assured him that the note contained nothing that could injure him; and then he became calmer, and went out into the air to recover his breath.

"Miss Wardour made haste to release me, and I came out of my concealment congratulating myself that I had been so lucky.

"And now I found myself compelled to leave W—— just as things were growing very interesting; I had made my flying visit in a moment of leisure, but my vacation had run out; duty, honour, and interest alike impelled me in another direction.

"I left my address with Miss Wardour, and I promised myself that at the first opportunity I would return to W—— and take up my abode here for a time.

"I had been in W—— not quite three days. I had not seen Jasper Lamotte, I had barely seen Frank, and I had added to my deductions made on the night of my arrival, until the case stood like this in my mind:

"1st. The robbers were familiar with Wardour, outside and in.

"2nd. They knew Miss Wardour, and her sensitiveness to the effects of chloroform.

"3rd. One of them was a man of gentlemanly propensities, and probably young.

"4th. They or a part of their number approached by the river, using a boat with muffled oars.

"So much for my deductions. Now for some coincidences.

"It was a coincidence that the handkerchief I got from Sir Clifford should bear Frank Lamotte's initials, and should be precisely like the one left behind by the robbers.

"It was a coincidence that Frank Lamotte should be a student of medicine, who might have been quite as capable of administering chloroform as was the burglar himself.

"It was a coincidence that Miss Sybil Lamotte should have eloped on the very day when her best friend was robbed, and that father, mother, and brother were all absent in behalf of the robbed friend, thus leaving the way open to the fugitives, and giving them plenty of time to escape.

"Now for some *facts* that looked strange.

"It was strange that Sybil Lamotte should leave her home to marry a man like John Burrill, when she was known to have bestowed her heart elsewhere.

"It was strange that Jasper Lamotte, going to the city to employ a detective, should so soon have stumbled upon Jerry Belknap, who was identified with no agency, and could only be reached through private means.

"It was strange that Frank Lamotte should set himself up as an amateur detective, and should bring back a report that tallied so perfectly with the deductions of Jerry Belknap.

"It was strange that Miss Wardour, having just been robbed of jewels to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, should be so little distressed, so little agitated, by her loss.

"From deductions, coincidences, and strange facts, I evolved the following theory, which certainly looked well from my standpoint, but might not hold water. You will see, that from the first I connected the Wardour robbery and the Lamotte elopement.

"Now, Sybil Lamotte's strange flight gave proof that there was a skeleton in the Lamotte closet. I said:

"If this unseen Mr. Lamotte had planned this robbery, and if for some reason it seemed good that his daughter should elope, how well all was arranged.

"His son assisting him, they could drop down from Mapleton in their row-boat; come up from the river, and, with their plans all laid, and knowing their ground, could make quick headway. Frank Lamotte's boot-heel would leave just such a print, as one of the

robbers left in the loose dirt beside the garden fence. Frank Lamotte would know just how to administer the chloroform. Then, Mr. Lamotte, in going to the city, ostensibly to procure the services of a detective, could easily take the spoils along; and his wife also, that she might be well out of his daughter's way. Such a man would naturally select a fellow like Jerry Belknap, who would keep up a farce of investigation, and keep away all who might, perhaps, stumble upon the truth. Frank's eagerness to be absent on this day of his sister's flight, and to assist in the search of the robbers, would be thus explained; and his anxiety concerning the contents of his sister's letter might be easily traced to a guilty conscience.

"But my theories were doomed to be laid aside for a time. Other duties claimed me and it was four weeks before I could turn so much as a thought toward W——.

"Before leaving the city, however, I had placed my wax cast of the chloroform bottle in the hands of one of my best men, and had also given him a clue upon which to work.

"My agent was wonderfully successful. He found the counterparts to the chloroform bottle, and then he began shadowing the owner of said vials. It proved to be a young woman who had formerly lived in W——, as a factory hand, but who had been transplanted to the city by Frank Lamotte.

"It is not necessary to enlarge upon the story of this girl as connected with Lamotte; but this must be borne in mind. During the time that my agent had this girl under surveillance, Frank Lamotte visited her, and, it is supposed that he removed the remaining bottles of the set, for one was afterwards exhumed, in fragments, from Doctor Heath's ash heap, by the industrious Jerry Belknap, and the others have disappeared."

At the mention of this factory girl Mrs. Aliston turned her face toward Constance, its expression saying as plainly as any language could, "I told you so." But Mr. Bathurst took no notice of this, and hurried on with his story.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE STORY OF LUCKY JIM.

"FROM the moment when I appeared among you as Brooks, my work was double. I was bent upon posting myself thoroughly in regard to Jasper Lamotte, and day by day I became more interested in the career of this remarkable man.

"Step by step, I trod backward the path of his history, since his advent in W——, gathering any information from many sources.

"It would be tedious to enter into details; suffice it to say that while I worked here, two others, trained to such research, were beating up the past I was so anxious to become familiar with. And a third, across the water, was gathering up the history of John Burrill, another object of interest to me at that time.

"And now I will reverse the order in which we made our search, and, beginning where my men left off, give you, in brief, the history of a remarkable man.

"The man we know as Jasper Lamotte figured in various cities, twenty-five years ago, and still earlier, as *Lucky Jim*, a handsome, well-educated, sharp witted, confidence man.

"He seldom gambled, and made his swindling operations of various sorts reap him a rich harvest; and, by his unvarying good luck, in escaping the dragons of the law, as well as because of his lucky ventures, he became known to his intimates as Lucky Jim.

"In these days, Miss Sybil Schuyler, the daughter of a wealthy old Maryland aristocrat, came to the city to reside with an aunt, while she completed her musical education. Lucky Jim saw her, and fell in love with her beautiful, haughty face.

"He contrived to make her acquaintance, and the rest was easy; it was a repetition of the old story; he was handsome and fascinating, she young and unsophisticated, with plenty of headstrong Southern blood and self-will.

"After a brief courtship, Lucky Jim married the Maryland heiress. Her father, as may be supposed, repudiated the marriage, but she clung to her scamp; and so the old Maryland aristocrat sent her a small fortune, which was hers, inherited from her mother's mother, and beyond his control, and bade her consider herself no more a Schuyler, of *the* Schuylers.

"For a time, Lucky Jim rode smoothly on the top wave of prosperity; his wife easily duped, believed him a Wall street operator. Frank was born, and then Sybil, and the Maryland beauty queened it in an elegant and secluded little home.

"But the crisis came. The silver cloud turned its dark side.

"Lucky Jim played a losing game, one day,

and his wife suddenly found herself face to face with the truth.

"They lived through stormy times, but Jim had, in his palmy days, left his wife's fortune intact, and now it proved an anchor to windward.

"They absented themselves from this country for more than two years; then they came back, and Lucky Jim brought his family, which now included Evan, to W——. The Maryland fortune enabled them to set up as aristocrats, and Lucky Jim seems to have aspired to become a power in the community.

"I don't think he often attempted any of his old confidence and swindling games; but, during his absences from home, which were frequent during his early residence here, he made a study of fine burglary.

"I can fancy how carefully he put his new schemes in practice, and how he passed himself off upon W—— as a rising speculator.

"He probably spent years in gathering together that select society, known as the Diamond Coterie.

"At first, it consisted of four: himself, a city pawnbroker known as Ezras, who received and negotiated the sale of the stolen goods, and who is as keen a rascal as ever escaped justice; and two noted cracksmen, who had headquarters in the city, and were famous in their day, but who were compelled to withdraw in the midst of their high career, one dying of a malignant fever, the other being killed by a woman.

"To replace these departed worthies, Ezras, who was always on the alert for pals, and who had had various crooked dealings with Jerry Belknap, brought this gentleman and Mr. Lamotte, or Lucky Jim together.

"Belknap proved the right man in the right place, and was soon admitted into the Coterie. Next to come under the favourable notice of Ezras was John Burrill, who had come over from England, bringing with him some ill-gotten gains, and who set himself up in New York as a swell cracksman.

"Now Burrill, the English boor, had an ambition. In this easy-going America, he hoped in some way to build himself into an aristocrat, and to shine as one of the lords of the land. To this end he hoarded his share of all the spoils, and, adding it to the sum brought from England, he began to find himself a rich man.

"Meantime, Mr. Lamotte had speculated a little too freely; he had built a mansion, and built his factories. He had been living like a prince, and some of his late ventures had failed. Something must be done. And then his eye fell upon Burrill; he coveted the Englishman's hoarded dollars.

"He found it easy to persuade Burrill to come to W——, ostensibly to take the position of overseer at the factories; really to be more readily duped by Lucky Jim. Burrill came; he saw how his comrade was respected and bowed down to by all W——. He had always admired Lucky Jim for his gentlemanly polish and his aristocratic manners; and he now concocted a scheme for his own aggrandisement. The Lamottes had made themselves aristocrats, they should make an aristocrat of him.

"You all know the result: John Burrill divorced his wife; Jasper Lamotte sold his daughter.

"While Frank Lamotte felt tolerably sanguine of winning the heiress of Wardour, the Wardour jewels were left unmolested. But when a rival came into the field, they determined to have the jewels, even if they lost the heiress.

"Accordingly they planned the robbery and the elopement, and you all know the afterpart.

"Miss Wardour, you once offered a reward for the arrest of the robbers who invaded Wardour Place, *not* to recover your diamonds, but for the sake of justice. It is for the sake of justice and for the future safety of peaceable citizens that I have run the Diamond Coterie to earth. For, be it known to you, ladies and gentlemen, that Miss Constance Wardour, like the wise young lady she is, took her jewels to an expert, one fine day, long ago, and had them all duplicated in paste; and while Jasper Lamotte and his clique were industriously carrying into safe hiding these paste diamonds the real Wardour jewels were reposing safely in the vaults of a city bank, and they repose there safely still.

"When Jasper Lamotte went to the city, two days before the killing of Burrill, he went to dispose of some of those paste jewels; and, not until then, did he learn how the heiress of Wardour had outwitted him.

"Miss Wardour, the career of the Diamond Coterie is at an end.

"Old Ezras has long been under our eye. Last night I sent a telegram, which will cause his instant arrest; and there are enough charges against him to insure him a life sentence, had he yet seventy years to live.

"John Burrill has passed beyond our reach. The news of his murder frustrated my nicely laid plans for his arrest, and turned my mind for some time from the Diamond Coterie to the task of clearing Sir Clifford.

"Frank Lamotte, too, with all his sin and selfishness, has passed before a higher tribunal.

"There remains only Jerry Belknap and Jasper Lamotte.

"To Jerry Belknap, I have promised protection—not because he deserves the same, but because in no other way could I avail myself of his services; and, to make my chain of evidence complete, I needed his testimony. He will go out to the frontier, and never appear again in New York.

"And now, perhaps, you can comprehend why I brought that charge of perjury against Jasper Lamotte. For his wife's sake, for his unhappy daughter's sake, for the sake of Evan Lamotte, who implored me, while going to give himself up to save another, that I would not let further disgrace bow his mother's head to the dust. For the sake of these unfortunate victims, I would let Jasper Lamotte go free, so far as we are concerned. The charge of perjury is enough for W——. The officers have chosen not to place him in confinement, so, if Jasper Lamotte is suddenly missed from among us, who can be questioned or blamed?

"I have acted in this matter solely on my own responsibility.

"I have seen Jasper Lamotte, and I gave him two alternatives to choose from. He could remain and be arrested as the head and front of the Diamond Coterie, or he could take passage on board the first ship bound for Australia, to remain there the rest of his natural life. He chose the latter, and I have appointed my agent, 'Smith, the book peddler,' as his guardian, to see that he carries out his contract to the letter.

"And now there is one thing more.

"After Burrill's death, Jasper and Frank Lamotte made a search for certain papers supposed to have been upon the person of the dead man; they never found them, for the reason that I, as Brooks, had relieved Burrill of the care of these same papers, weeks before, substituting for them blanks, which no doubt Burrill had hidden somewhere, in one of his fits of drunken caution.

"These papers define distinctly such portions of the Lamotte property as in reality belonged to Burrill; and if I am not mistaken in Mrs. Lamotte and her daughter, they will wish no share in it. I will put these papers into your hands, Mr. O'Meara, to be held for future action."

CHAPTER XLVII.

AFTER THE DRAMA ENDED.

"CLIFFORD," says the heiress of Wardour, standing beside her lover, one winter day, not long after the extinction of the Diamond Coterie, "Clifford I have been to Mapleton to-day, for the first time since—"

She pauses abruptly, and her lover draws her closer to his side, with all his olden assurance shining in the eyes he bends down upon her.

"Since the drama ended." he finishes. "You have been to Mapleton, beloved! Tell me about it."

"There's something I wish to tell you, Clifford; something that in full, Mr. Bathurst generously kept out of his story when he told us the rest; something that is known as it is only to Mrs. Lamotte, Sybil, Evan, Mr. Belknap, Mr. Bathurst, and myself, but which I think I had better tell you now."

"I am listening Conny."

"Well, you see when the robbers made off with my paste diamonds—think of its being the Lamottes, Clifford—when they robbed me of nothing, I felt quite relieved, for those diamonds *had* been a burden. I made up my mind to make the most of the business, and let everybody think me a loser, hoping thus to possess myself and my diamonds in peace and safety. But your Mr. Bathurst—"

"My Mr. Bathurst!"

"Well, *my* Mr. Bathurst, then; only you very well know that he has a wife. When *my* Mr. Bathurst had talked to me a second time—I believe that man can see straight through people—he had my secret at his tongue's end; and he warned me to be very cautious and not to tell *any one* the truth concerning the diamonds. In spite of this, one evening, when some imp possessed me, I told Sybil Lamotte. I shall never forget her strange manner, nor her wild words. Clifford, that awful mistake of mine almost made Sybil a murderess."

"Constance!"

"Listen, dear! Sybil had brooded over what I had told her. Trouble was unsettling her mind. She had some valuable jewels; she went with her mother to the city, and while there had the real stones replaced by

paste, as I had done, and received two thousand dollars for her diamonds.

"In some way she had found out that Jerry Belknap was a man to be bought; she obtained an interview with him, and offered him two thousand dollars if he would *get John Burrill out of her way!*"

"Good heavens!"

"Don't interrupt me. Belknap agreed to remove Burrill, and received five hundred dollars in advance. He sent to the city for a ruffian, one of his tools. The man came, but Mr. Bathurst had his eye upon him. On the night of the murder, this ruffian was hidden outside of the saloon, waiting to follow and waylay John Burrill when he should go home. The boy detective, George, was hidden and watching the ruffian. Do you follow?"

"Yes! yes!"

"When Burrill came out of the saloon, the ruffian, supposing of course that he was going home, hurried on ahead, crossed the bridge, and secreted himself in the hedge. The boy, George, was far enough behind to see that Burrill was *not* going home, but he was acting as directed by Mr. Bathurst, and so followed the ruffian. Think of it, Clifford! While Sybil's paid assassin lay in wait for his victim, Sybil's brother was saving her soul from guilt, by taking a crime upon his own. But for Evan's knife, poor half-crazed Sybil would have been a murderess, and this I knew in part from the first, and that is why I said that the true slayer must not be punished; until they brought Evan Lamotte into court, I believed that Sybil was the guilty one."

"And you could not betray your unfortunate friend? My true-hearted Constance!"

"I had promised Mrs. Lamotte not to betray her, but was nerving myself to dare all and save you, when poor Evan threw himself into the breach and saved us all three. You must know, Clifford, that Mr. Belknap made a full confession to Mr. Bathurst, when he found he could do no better. And Mr. Bathurst, knowing that I was aware of Sybil's dealings with Belknap, told me everything."

"And this is what Bathurst meant when he said that Sybil believed herself guilty. I thought he referred to some of her insane ravings."

"So they all thought. But it is best as it is. There is no need to tell this sad story, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless it seems best that Ray Vandyck should know it."

"Poor Ray! Conny, if the time ever comes when Ray and Sybil meet again, *she* will tell him her own story." Constance bent over the glowing coals a moment, and then, lifting her face, she said in a hushed voice:

"I saw Evan."

"And he—"

"He is just fading out of life. Oh! it was so fortunate that there was no resistance to the humane ones who sought to help him out of that gloomy prison. Sybil never leaves him for a moment. Oh, what must her feelings have been when she learned that Evan had saved her from a lifetime of remorse! I could see by her face—oh! such a poor, pale, sad, utterly changed face!—that she knew all, everything. She greeted me, so timidly, yet with so much of thankfulness. But, she had eyes and ears for no one but Evan, although she is too weak to do more than sit beside him and hold his hand. But Mrs. Lamotte's courage is wonderful. Old Mr. Schuyler, Sybil's grandfather, is dead, and he has left Mrs. Lamotte his property; but, so tied up that Mr. Lamotte could never touch a dollar. Mrs. Lamotte says that when it is over—Evan's life, you know—she shall take Sybil and go to live in her old Maryland home. They will not touch a penny of John Burrill's money: it is all to be transferred to his first wife, to be held in trust for her little boy. The woman is going back to England as soon as the transfer is made. Mrs. Lamotte said to me to-day:

"'After all these years, Constance, I am to have an old age of peace, I trust. Mr. Lamotte and I have parted for ever. My love for him died long since, so this gives me no pain. My keenest sorrow is that I never gave my poor Evan his full share of my mother-love. He came with my sorrow, and bears the impress of my despair and madness. If we could only save and keep him! But it is best as it is. Mind and body seem dying together, and it is better so. When all is over, I shall take Sybil away, where there will be nothing to recall her wretched past; and there I shall trust her to Time, the Healer.'

"She never mentioned Frank's name, Clifford," bending forward to look in his face. "Do you know what I see in the future? I see poor Evan laid away under the snows; I see the memory of John Burrill sunk into oblivion.

I see Sybil Lamotte coming slowly back to life and hope and happiness, under the kind blue Maryland skies. I see Mrs. Lamotte, her pride softened and chastened, and a look of serene content upon her face. And I see Ray Vandyck making his way southward some day, and standing before Sybil with his heart in his eyes. I see—"

"You see enough. Leave Ray and Sybil face to face; you and I can guess the rest. Do you see Doctor Clifford Heathercliffe resuming his practice in W——, as if nothing had happened? For that's what his newly appointed tyrant has bidden him do. Do you see a certain fair lady, transformed into Lady Heathercliffe by and by, and sailing away over the seas to bewilder the dwellers of Heathercliffe Towers with the brightness of her eyes and, in spite of the Diamond Coterie, to blaze forth upon the 'nobility and gentry' of Hampshire, in all the splendour of the Wardour diamonds? All this shall come to pass, beloved; and, since it has gained me the fairest, bravest, truest wife in Christendom, I can even rejoice in the persecutions and the hatred of the Diamond Coterie.

"If John Burrill had not mistaken me for Herbert, on the night when the feud began, he might now be living, perhaps, and you and I be far apart; so, at the last, Herbert Heathercliffe, in his grave, has done me a service. I do look like him, Conny, and it's small wonder Burrill knew me for a Heathercliffe, and made capital out of my altered name. But all that is past. My darling, we have learned our hard lesson, now we have only to forgive the dead and the erring, to forget the shadows and sorrows of the past, and to say: 'God bless our friends in need; God bless Bathurst, king of his kind; God bless the O'Mearas; God bless the beautiful darling who outwitted the Diamond Coterie, and who wears the Wardour diamonds and the Wardour honour with regal grace.'"

THE END.

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Stirling, April 1893.

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